JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

FERRIS GREENSLET

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JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY

FERRIS GREENSLET

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THIS attempt to present within the space of a single volume a comprehensive view of the life of Lowell and a consistent interpretation of his work is grounded largely upon printed sources. Chief of these is the admirable collection of his letters edited by Mr. Charles Eliot Norton. I have, indeed, endeavored to make Lowell, so far as possible, tell his own story, and be his own interpreter, in multitudinous short excerpts from his correspondence. I have quoted from the Letters with the permission of Harper & Brothers, proprietors of the copyright, my citations being from the augmented edition issued in three volumes by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. under arrangement with Harper & Brothers. Second only to the Letters as a storehouse of facts has been the elaborate Life in two volumes prepared by Horace E. Scudder. The records and impressions of Lowell by Mr. Howells, Mr. Henry James, Mr. A. Lawrence Lowell, Col. T. W. Higginson, Mr. G. E. Woodberry, and

Dr. E. E. Hale have all been of considerable service; while the two volumes of memorabilia by F. H. Underwood have been specially helpful at many points. Other obligations will appear in the text and will be duly acknowledged in foot-notes. From these various and often discrepant sources I have endeavored to mould a just impression of Lowell's life, modifying it or amplifying it from fresh manuscript material when it could be found and Cantabrigian tradition when it could be trusted. I have everywhere tried to verify and vivify this impression by constant recourse to Lowell's own writings; in this respect Lowell's commonplace books and note-books, which were placed in my hands by Mr. Norton, have been of the greatest assistance.

As an exhaustive bibliography of Lowell's writings by Mr. George Willis Cooke is soon to be forthcoming, I have not thought it necessary to burden this volume with a necessarily less complete one. I have to thank Mr. Cooke for aid in clearing up one or two doubtful points of Lowell bibliography. For permission to print a few letters which appear for the first time in this book, I am indebted to the kindness of Messrs. Thomas

Bailey Aldrich, Francis J. Garrison, and James Loeb. For the verses from Emerson's unpublished poem to Lowell, which have a place in Chapter III, I am obliged to the courtesy of Dr. Edward Emerson. It is a particular pleasure to express my obligation to Mr. Norton for much finely helpful talk and for other assistance of the most generous and painstaking nature.

CAMBRIDGE, May, 1905.

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JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

CHAPTER I

THE YOUTH OF A POET

1819–1839

PERHAPS one may no more fitly begin the narrative of so fine yet so complex a life as Lowell's than by taking for his scripture his author's own ideal of biographical method and propriety. "I fancy an honest man," says Lowell in one place, "easier in his grave with the bare truth told about him on his headstone." Yet even a short biography, we may hope, is not precisely a headstone, and even for it "the bare truth" is not quite enough. Writing in 1886 to Mr. Charles Eliot Norton concerning some of the difficulties that beset a biographer of Carlyle, Lowell himself put this with characteristic vigor: "The main ingredient a biographer should contribute is sympathy (which includes insight). Truth is not enough, for in biography, as in law, the greater the truth sometimes the greater the

libel." In a lecture upon Chapman delivered the same year he protests with a curious warmth of feeling against the gossips of biography, and lays down this suggestive article of biographical orthodoxy: —

"Of course, in whatever the man himself has made a part of the record we are entitled to find what intimations we can of his genuine self, of the real man, veiled under the draperies of convention and circumstance, who was visible for so many years, yet perhaps never truly seen, obscurely known to himself, conjectured even by his intimates, and a mere name to all beside."

There is little comfort here for the Mr. Gigadibses of biography, and even less for Paul Pry with his artless pencil; yet for a biographer of the third generation, wishing to write a "biography of the mind" of a man whom he never saw, it is reassuring. In this narrative of Lowell's life and study of his genius there will be little occasion to adduce any piece of "bare truth" that the man himself in his essays, his poems, and his letters[1] has not made a part of the record. When we endeavor to add to our portrait of his personality some analysis of the things that elemented it, we shall have perforce to turn

[1] A man's private letters are a doubtful part of his "record," but when edited by so dear and discreet a friend as Mr. Norton, they may be reasonably so considered.

to other records than his own, to follow faint clues and indirections from the lips and pens of others. Here again he would be a headstrong biographer, who — being familiar enough with Lowell's personality to bring any sympathy to its portrayal — could so run counter to the charm and potency of it as to use his gleanings of external fact in any other spirit than that foreshadowed in the texts set down above.

1. *Influences of Childhood.*

Few poets — and for almost the half of his life our author was pure poet — ever came upon the world's stage among more fit surroundings than James Russell Lowell: few have been more tenacious of home. Elmwood, the old house in which he was born and in which he was to die, was always for him the shrine and sanctuary of his deepest sentiment. Even to-day one cannot pass attentively through its wide rooms, and look from its windows, without seeing a greater part of the visible and material symbols about which Lowell's poetic imagination most habitually played. It is, therefore, not for nothing that the names of Lowell and Elmwood have come to have a certain mystic alliance in the minds of all American readers.

The house was built, some years before the Revolution, for Thomas Oliver, who had inherited

a fortune made in the West Indian trade, and married the daughter of Colonel John Vassall, one of the Royalist grandees of Cambridge. Oliver, who was something of an amateur poet, must have had a pretty eye for landscape, as well as a nice sense of the things that make for comfort and dignity in a dwelling. He chose his site upon the slow-winding thoroughfare known as Tory Row, now Brattle Street, a mile from Harvard College, the geographical and social centre of the town of Cambridge. The house was reared three square stories high, comfortably facing southeast by east; and, for the further frustration of the keen New England blasts, with blind walls of brick to the west and north. From the front windows one looked over the lane that led to the highway, across a stretch of pasture land, to the clustering elms and prim spires of the college town. On the right the smooth-sliding, circuitous Charles slipped through brown salt meadows to the sea. A mile back from its further shore the low curve of Corey's Hill gave a special touch of character to the view. Behind the house, a ten minutes' walk distant, lay the picturesquely bayed Fresh Pond, and beyond that stretched the wooded hills of Belmont and Arlington, and the pine-margined pastures of Lexington.

Thomas Oliver, however, was soon compelled

to absent himself from the felicity of this charming and dignified abode. As lieutenant-governor of the Province and president of the council appointed by George III, he incurred the displeasure of the more zealous patriots in his neighborhood. Early one morning in September, 1774, Elmwood was surrounded by a considerable company of Cantabrigians and Bostonians, who forced Oliver to sign his abdication. He complied, adding with something of a stoical humor, "My house at Cambridge being surrounded by about four thousand people, in compliance with their demand I sign my name." He at once withdrew to Boston, whence, after serving as civil governor, he retired to Halifax with the British forces in 1776.

For a time the brave old house knew vicissitudes. It was used as a hospital by the American soldiers; later the Committee of Correspondence was quartered there; eventually it was confiscated by the Commonwealth and sold. After passing through the hands of two owners, — the second of them Elbridge Gerry, Governor of Massachusetts, Vice-President of the United States, and the great original of "gerrymandering," — it was bought in 1818 by the Rev. Charles Lowell, of the West Congregational Church in Boston. After nearly ninety years it is still the property of the Lowell heirs. It stands

to-day ever more and more nearly beset by the slighter dwellings of a later time, inscrutable, and a little ironical; revisited, as some of its more imaginative occupants have believed, by the revenants of five generations.

The Rev. Charles Lowell, who, with his wife and five children, established himself in the old Tory house in 1818, was a member of one of the oldest and best reputed families in the Commonwealth. Perceval Lowell, or Lowle, the first American settler of the name, migrated from Somersetshire to the Massachusetts Colony in 1639. He was the author of some fluent but mediocre memorial verses on the death of Governor Winthrop, which may still be seen in the Appendix to the "Life and Letters of Winthrop." He died in Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1665. After the lapse of three not particularly conspicuous generations the Rev. John Lowell, born in 1704 and graduated from Harvard with the class of 1721, was a clergyman of some local distinction. His son John, born in 1743, was of the Harvard class of 1760, and in social dignity ranked seventh, it is said, in its list of twenty-seven members. This John Lowell, the grandfather of our author, studied law, and was, throughout his life, prominent in the public business of the Commonwealth. He was an active leader in the Revolutionary movement. He was

successively representative to the General Court, member of the convention for framing a state constitution, delegate to the Continental Congress, judge of the Admiralty Court of Appeals, one of the commissioners to establish the boundary line between New York and Massachusetts, and chief justice of the circuit court for the first circuit of Massachusetts. He was also a member of the corporation of Harvard College and one of the founders of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In Allen's old Biographical Dictionary, John Lowell was described as "uniting to a vigorous mind, which was enriched with literary acquisitions, a refined taste and conciliatory manners; being sincere in the belief and practice of the Christian religion." It was he who introduced into the Bill of Rights the clause abolishing slavery in Massachusetts.

Charles Lowell, the father of our author, was the son of John Lowell by a third marriage. He was born in 1782 and graduated from Harvard in 1800. After leaving college and trying his father's profession for a couple of years, he decided to enter the ministry, and enjoyed the advantage, none too common in those days, of three years of study abroad, chiefly under the great Dugald Stewart. In these years he had the acquaintance of Wilberforce and of other eminent and interesting men, and, in an excursion

upon the Continent, saw Napoleon. When, in 1805, he returned to become minister of the West Church in Boston, he brought with him something of dignity, suavity, and lifted horizon, for which he was ever afterward admired and loved by his parishioners.

The Rev. Charles Lowell's character and temperament are not hard to discover. Writing to C. F. Briggs in 1844, his son "Jemmy" said of him, "He is Dr. Primrose in the comparative degree, the very simplest and charmingest of sexagenarians, and not without a great deal of the truest magnanimity." He seems to have possessed an oratorical temperament of the refined rather than of the coarser sort, and, in the pulpit, to have been more impressive from the earnestness and charm of his delivery than from the weight and originality of the things delivered. He would seem to have been at his best in his daily pastoral care, and he was famous among his fellows as an example of affectionate fidelity to his flock. As was to be expected in a man of his character and training, his sympathies in politics and literature were largely conservative and reactionary. Abolitionism was for him an eccentric crusade, and he esteemed Pope the best poet in the world. In religious faith, however, he was increasingly Unitarian, though he never left the orthodox Congregational fellow-

ship. He was not remarkable for a sense of humor; and certainly he was, as his most brilliant son said of Browning's father, "permanently astonished at the fruit of his loins." [1]

Curious inquirers into the intricacies of heredity will like to find something of the source of this astonishment at his children in the nature of their mother.

In 1806 Charles Lowell married Harriet Traill Spence, an indirect cousin and a childhood's sweetheart. Both her father, Keith Spence, and her maternal grandfather, Robert Traill, were born in the Orkney Islands, and the imaginative Mrs. Lowell and her more imaginative son liked to trace their descent to persons no less portentous than Minna Troil and Sir Patrick Spens. At any rate, Mrs. Lowell possessed much of the wild beauty of the people of those windy northern isles, and her mind showed an irresistible tendency toward their poetic occultism. This tendency became irretrievably fixed by a visit which she made to the Orkneys in company with her husband early in their married life. Thenceforward until 1842, when her tense brain became disordered, she was a faerie-seer, credited by some with second sight. Like so many mothers

[1] A rather meagre and perfunctory memoir of Charles Lowell may be found in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, first series, vol. v.

of English poets, she was much given to crooning old ballads in the twilight. Apart from this mystical strain in her nature, three points are, for our purpose, especially notable. Her family was Tory in its sympathy; it was Episcopalian, where the Lowells were orthodox Congregationalists, or Unitarians; and there was a certain dreamful languor in the blood that blent queerly with the characteristic Lowell effectiveness. Throughout his early life, whenever our author failed to do any of the things which, for his domestic or his academic health, he should have done, the Lowell connection was prompt to attribute it to this deep quality, which they miscalled "the Spence negligence." [1]

James Russell Lowell was born on the 22d of February, 1819, a year after his father with five elder children had established himself at Elmwood. He was born, as he liked half whimsically to remind his friends, with a caul. Nor was his infancy, if we may credit family tradition, without other portents of fame. Throughout his childhood Mary Lowell, afterward Mrs. S. R. Putnam, his elder sister by nine years, was his

[1] There seems to have been two sides to this, for in 1884, Lowell, writing to Mr. Norton, refers to the "indolence (I know not whether to call it intellectual or physical) that I inherited from my father." But indolence is not quite the same thing as negligence, and it may well be that in Lowell both dispositions met and mingled.

special mentor and confidante. The notes which she made of "Jemmy's" youth picture him in his earliest years as a highly imaginative boy, yet one remarkable for kindness and self-control. Lowell — like Milton, like Cowley, who was made by it "irremediably" a poet, and like Keats — first knew the spell of great literature from the "Faerie Queene." He was read to sleep from it, and very early began to amuse himself by retelling its episodes to his playmates. It is certainly not too fanciful to find in Lowell's youthful acquaintance with that long gallery of rich and varied pictures, echoing with sweet melodies, one cause of the direction of his earliest poetic endeavor. He had, too, even in those years, a markedly active visual imagination. Late in his life he related to Dr. Weir Mitchell how, in his childhood, his walks were constantly attended by mediæval figures that were for him more real than living men.

At best, however, these things are of the impalpable stuff of dreams. They loom preternaturally large through the mists of memory, and may easily lead a biographer too far afield. Looking at Lowell's childhood analytically, two influences of the first significance are unmistakably discerned: his love of the outdoor world at Elmwood, and his equally strong love for an indoor world of literature.

Elmwood took its name from the row of stately English elms that guarded it, and early in his ownership Charles Lowell had set out with his own hands numerous specimens of that other tree beloved of our transcendental poets, the pine. This bowery loneliness that encircled the house proved marvelously attractive to birds of every sort, and it was in playing among the vocal thickets of his home that Lowell gained much of that intimate love and knowledge of trees and birds which informs some of his most purely poetic poetry. The best account of what this early love of nature did toward the shaping of his mind is to be found in some of his own later writings; for it is surely true that as the serpent, according to the old mystic symbol of life, swallows more of his tail, the morning of life and its early prime are seen more and more in true measure and proportion. The familiar passage in "The Cathedral," recounting a youth's

> "Virginal cognitions, gifts of morn
> Ere life grow noisy,"

is quite certainly not dramatic but personal. Not even in the "Prelude" is there a more telling picture of a young poetic imagination — like Dyer's deathless lamb, who "feels the fresh world about him" — startled into intense life by the succession of Nature's pure and thrilling moods: —

CAMBRIDGE IN 1824

"One spring I knew as never any since:
All night the surges of the warm southwest
Boomed intermittent through the wallowing elms,
And brought a morning from the Gulf adrift,
Omnipotent with sunshine, whose quick charm
Startled with crocuses the sullen turf
And wiled the bluebird to his whiff of song:
One summer hour abides, what time I perched,
Dappled with noonday, under simmering leaves,
And pulled the pulpy oxhearts, while aloof
An oriole chattered and the robins shrilled,
Denouncing me an alien and a thief:
One morn of autumn lords it o'er the rest,
When in the lane I watched the ash-leaves fall,
Balancing softly earthward without wind,
Or twirling with directer impulse down
On those fallen yesterday, now barbed with frost,
While I grew pensive with the pensive year:
And once I learned how marvellous winter was,
When past the fence-rails, downy-gray with rime,
I creaked adventurous o'er the spangled crust
That made familiar fields seem far and strange
As those stark wastes that whiten endlessly
In ghastly solitude about the pole,
And gleam relentless to the unsetting sun:
. . . . . .
Which I, young savage, in my age of flint,
Gazed at, and dimly felt a power in me
Parted from Nature by the joy in her
That doubtfully revealed me to myself."

Less elaborate, but no less suggestive and picturesque, is the bright glimpse we get of Lowell's childhood in the anecdote he told in 1865

to Mr. Howells, who has set down with such delicate fidelity so many human glimpses of Lowell the man. When "Jemmy" was but six his father had taken him on a brief journey; as they drove to the gate of Elmwood on their return, he said to him, as Lowell vividly remembered after forty years, "Ah, this is a pleasant place. I wonder who lives here, what little boy?"

In the Rev. Charles Lowell's library were some 3000 or 4000 volumes, among which divinity was by no means paramount. As both Mrs. Lowell and Mary Lowell, in addition to their habit of singing and reciting poetry, were omnivorous readers, and had a turn for languages,[1] the growing boy did not lack either the opportunity or the stimulus to make that early acquaintance with books as living, companionable things that goes so far toward making a man a freeholder in the commonwealth of letters. In his earliest recorded letter there is an intimation that he had, too, that childish delight in the possession of the material body of a book, that so many ripe booklovers will mistily recall: —

[1] In the *Homes of American Authors*, C. F. Briggs wrote of the latter, — it is to be hoped hyperbolically, — "She converses readily in French, Italian, German, Polish, Swedish, and Hungarian, and is familiar with twenty modern dialects, besides Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Persic, and Arabic."

January 25, 1827.

My dear brother The dog and the colt went down today with our boy for me and the colt went before and then the horse and slay and dog — I went to a party and I danced a great deal and was very happy — I read French stories — The colt plays very much — and follows the horse when it is out.

Your affectionate brother

James R. Lowell.

I forgot to tell you that sister mary has not given me any present but I have got three books.[1]

A year after this he was eagerly reading Scott's novels, which were then in their first vogue.

Before closing this necessarily too swift account of the influences and forces that were at work in Lowell's childhood, two things remain to be set down.

There is plenty of evidence that young Lowell's so plastic and acquisitive mind received a deep coloring from the colonial and revolutionary associations with which his home and his home village were saturated. To take a single, not too fanciful, instance: We know from Lowell's own statement that in childhood he was

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 8.

deeply impressed by the painting of a group of old New England divines, each with his long church-warden pipe, which he had seen in his great-grandfather's house at Newbury, and which was later removed and placed over the mantel in his own study at Elmwood. It is for the psychologists to determine how far this vivid early image may have assisted that full visualization of old-time worthies that makes his "New England Two Centuries Ago" so convincing. Yet no one who has seen the quaint picture, and read his Lowell attentively, can doubt that there is "something in it." This sense of historical New England was solidified and extended by the frequent journeys which he took a-chaise with his father through eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire.

Finally, along with "gumbiles" and other maladies incident to childhood, we find that Lowell was disturbed by the youthful poet's customary precocious stirrings of sentiment. In a letter written at the mature age of eighteen appears a passage that is not altogether whimsical, for Lowell was not quite the man to jest in such matters,— least of all in the years of his storm and stress: —

"In common with Petrarch, Dante, Tasso, and Byron, I was desperately in love before I was

ten years old. What pangs I have suffered my own heart, perhaps, only knows."[1]

2. *Education.*

Lowell learned his A B C's and other rudiments at a "dame school" in Cambridge. At the age of nine he was sent to the boarding and day school near his home kept by Mr. William Wells, an Englishman famous for the excellence of the Latin scholarship in which he instructed his boys, sometimes with the effectual aid of an ancient implement not recognized by the newer pedagogy. Among his schoolmates were W. W. Story and other likely boys who were to be his lifelong friends. Of these school days no very significant external records are preserved, though Colonel T. W. Higginson, who was one of the younger boys at Mr. Wells's, remembers how Lowell and Story would reason boyishly together of the "Faerie Queene;" and others recall the tall tales of wonder wherewith Lowell liked to widen the eyes of the smaller lads. Finally, whoever would know with what gusto the budding humanist was tasting the quaint, diverse life of the old college town, has but to read the loving record which in 1854 he addressed to the "Edelmann Storg" (W. W. Story) in "Cambridge Thirty Years Ago."

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 23.

When Lowell went, in 1834, from Mr. Wells's school to Harvard College, that institution numbered some two hundred youth, instructed by a small body of professors, including a few men of real eminence, like Felton, Peirce, and Ticknor (succeeded by Longfellow in Lowell's junior year), and presided over by Josiah Quincy, whom he has memorialized in one of the most unerring of his essays as "A Great Public Character." The course of study in those days was of an incredible rigidity, and the hard pursuit of Greek, Latin, and mathematics was broken by no more enlivening subsidiary studies than Paley's "Evidences," Butler's "Analogy," and a little of the modern languages. At first Lowell lived at home, but had a room near the college yard for study, and, we may believe, for conversation. Later on this was his regular abode.

The nature of Lowell's development in the four years of his college course can be unmistakably traced in his letters. It is a striking picture painted there of that

> "New England youth that seems a sort of pill,
> Half wish-I-dared, half Edwards on the Will."

He was a shy, yet not very tractable youth, given, like so many boys who are shy from excess rather than from defect of ability, to occasional violence and oddity of expression or act. Thus we find

him habitually addressing one of his intimates as "dearest Shack," with a curious Platonic warmth now out of fashion among college boys, or recording a night spent in a graveyard "striving to raise ghosts."

Perhaps the most notable of all the phenomena adumbrated in Lowell's letters written in college is the development in him of the habitude of the browsing, omnivorous reader. In the Introduction to "Some Letters of Walter Savage Landor," written when Lowell was close to his threescore years and ten, he recalls how "in one of those arched alcoves in the old college library in Harvard Hall, which so pleasantly secluded without isolating the student," he made lifelong friendships with Landor, Dodsley's "Old Plays," Cotton's "Montaigne," and Hakluyt's "Voyages," among others that were not in his father's library. What some of these others were we discover from the letters; it is an interesting list, suggesting the transitional taste of these not yet quite catholic days: it includes — along with his old love, Spenser — Butler, Southey's "Doctor," Cowper, Beattie, Dante, Tasso, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Carlyle, and Milton. Of the last he writes significantly: "By the bye, Milton has excited my ambition to read all the Greek and Latin classics which he did." Indeed, the two striking things about

Lowell's miscellaneous reading in college, as it is seen reflected in his correspondence, are the exuberance of his intellectual curiosity and his fine sensitiveness to tone, to the voice-quality of books, which were, as we shall see, always his marked characteristics as a critic.

A second notable trait of Lowell in his college days was his fervid and tempestuous sentiment. In part, no doubt, this was the fashion of the time; for in the thirties America was just experiencing a resurgence of "sensibility" similar to that which had made England politely melt in tears nearly a century before. But in part, at least, it was intensely personal with Lowell. He writes to his "dearest Shack" that he likes best poetry that brings tears to his eyes, and again, at the end of his junior year, "Shack, pity me! I am in love, and have been so for a long time, hopelessly in love." But even in these early letters we can see how Lowell's Wertherism was corrected by one of those temperamental antinomies that were always so marked, and sometimes so puzzling, in him. In the most Wertherian of his letters there is sure to be some picture of fresh outdoors, some piece of sportive humor, that lets a wholesome daylight in.

This sportive, high-spirited humor is the most conspicuous quality of his literary ventures in college. As secretary of the Hasty Pudding

Club, and later as one of the editors of "Harvardiana," the college magazine, Lowell turned out a great deal of writing in many veins. Fierce satires, and edifying essays there are in plenty, but these, despite their earnestness, have little to interest us beyond the special fluency of the rather tenebrous word-mongering common to undergraduate compositions in this kind. In the field of frank nonsense, on the other hand, he writes with a surprisingly attractive spontaneity, unction, and directness. So fertile was this vein that his very letters are full of it. How good in their young way, and how suggestive of later similar ebullitions, are these lines in the Burns stanza, to his friend G. B. Loring,[1] —

"Having set Pegasus agoin',
Wi' weel-nibb'd pen, and ink aflowin'
While yet my rhymin' fit is growin',
I'll stick it out
An' let ye ken in stanzas glowin'
What I 'm about.

At present, then, yonr friend 's reposin'
Upon a couch, his e'en half closin'.
Sma', common minds wad think him dozin'
Or aiblins fou,[1]
While a' the time he 's fast composin'
These lines to you."

[1] "Aiblins" — *Anglice*, perhaps. "Fou," — corned.

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 31.

Lowell's sense of values was not such as to comport with the college standards of his time, nor were his genial avocations of various reading and versifying such as to induce the punctilious observance of academic routine. As time went on, the "Spence negligence" did its appointed work. By the end of his junior year he was causing his family some disquiet. In May, 1837, his father, who was sailing with Mrs. Lowell for a stay of three years in Europe, wrote from New York in anxious valediction: —

"I shall direct Charles to pay you half a dollar a week. If you are one of the first eight admitted to Φ. B. K., $1.00 per week, as soon as you are admitted. If you are not, to pay you 75 cents per week as soon as you are admitted. If I find my finances will allow it, I shall buy you something abroad. If you graduate one of the first five in your class, I shall give you $100 on your graduation. If one of the first ten, $75. If one of the first twelve, $50. If the first or second scholar, $200. If you do not miss any exercises unexcused, you shall have Bryant's 'Mythology' or any book of equal value, unless it is one I may specially want." [1]

Young Lowell, however, seems to have had no unbridled lust for Bryant's "Mythology." Throughout his senior year his unexcused absences

[1] Scudder, vol. i, p. 43.

from recitations and chapel exercises increased in number until they reached a total that even now is startling to an academically trained reader. Finally, so the story runs,[1] there came a characteristic ebullition, during one of his infrequent appearances at evening prayers, that brought matters to a head. Having been elected in the morning poet of his class, Lowell had spent the day in ambrosial jubilation. At prayers that evening, being still jubilant, he arose in his seat and bowed low to the right and to the left. Coming at the end of a long career of consistent negligence, this breach of decorum was not to be passed in silence. The faculty considered his case and passed the following resolution: —

"25 June, 1838. Voted that Lowell, senior, on account of continued neglect of his college duties, be suspended till the Saturday before Commencement, to pursue his studies with Mr. Frost of Concord, to recite to him twice a day, reviewing the whole of Locke's 'Essay,' and studying also Mackintosh's 'Review of Ethical Philosophy,' to be examined in both on his return, and not to visit Cambridge during the period of his suspension." [2]

On the whole, Lowell accepted his period of

[1] See T. W. Higginson's *Old Cambridge*, p. 157. This version of the affair is substantiated by an oral tradition.

[2] Scudder, vol. i, p. 48.

Babylonish captivity very cheerfully. The Rev. Barzillai Frost, in whose custody he was placed, was a well-meaning young pedant who unconsciously afforded his young eaglet some amusement, and Mrs. Frost, who seems to have been a sensible and kindly woman, did what she could to make his durance tolerable. He met Emerson, who had a decided kindness for him, and took him several times to walk; though Lowell's sympathies were still too conservative, too alien from the Transcendental way of thought, for him to yield himself as yet unreservedly to the older man's influence. He wrote to his friends in Cambridge of both Emerson and Thoreau with a queer union of boyish liking, critical aloofness, and a disposition to mock. But his letters from Concord are chiefly filled with pretty descriptions of the Concord landscape, — which afterwards played a part in some of the more idyllic passages in the "Biglow Papers," — with outbursts about a boyish love affair which he was just then taking very seriously, and with reports of his progress upon his class poem. This last occupation was his chief interest during his rustication. Though he was not suffered to return to Cambridge until Class Day was past, when he came back to take his degree he had the poem privately printed for distribution among his friends and classmates.

Save from book collectors and dealers in rariora, Lowell's "Class Poem" [1] has never had quite the close attention that it deserves. In vigor and variety it is a remarkable performance for a youth of nineteen, and it has many striking traits that foreshadow the quality of its author's mature work. Lowell's previous poetic ventures were shorter and slighter, tossed off in high spirits and a little time. But for the writing of this Class Poem he had two months of comparative leisure and isolation, in which he could endeavor to get out the best and most sincere poetic stuff that was in him. He had, moreover, to aid him in its composition something of that sense of external occasion which was always to be the most efficient spur to his poetic genius.

The first thing that strikes the analytical reader of the poem to-day is its metrical fertility and precision: Popian couplets, the octave stanza of Ariosto and Byron, swift-footed pairs of anapæsts, all are employed, and with a strikingly easy and correct mastery. The second thing to remark is the aristocratic and conservative bias of the satire. Young Lowell is still his father's son, and his grandfather's grandson, a true child

[1] *Class Poem:* —

"Some said, John, print it; others said, Not so:
Some said, It might do good; others said, No."
Bunyan. 1838.

of the old house which, as he said many years later, "was born a Tory and will die one." From Aristophanes down the great satirists have been Tories, and have turned their points against innovation rather than against tradition. Here, for a time at least, Lowell in his youthful way was quite in the apostolic succession of satirists. The objects of his satire were Emerson[1] and Transcendentalism, Carlyle, Abolitionists, Temperance Agitators, Woman's Righters, and Vegetarians. In every case except the last the satire suffers from Lowell's inability to grasp, even intellectually, the case for the defense. On the milder vice of Vegetarianism, however, he is at his best, and we have a passage of excellent fooling, culminating in the young poet's expression of his surprise that certain of the meat-eating men of history have reached fourscore, —

> "In spite of all the meat and drink and mirth,
> Which had been preying on them from their birth."

Yet even here there are foregleams of the passionate sympathy with men which came to be the motive force of Lowell's later period of ardent abolitionism, and never ceased to mellow the conservatism of his last years. He pleads for

[1] Two weeks after the poem was printed Lowell sent it to Emerson with a very manly and right-spirited letter, asking him to believe that the satire was inspired by no personal animus.

the misused Indians with a feeling quite other than that pensive poetic regret for their lot which Freneau had shown in his "Indian Burying Ground," and which had become a conventional poetic strain. In the temper of the poem, too, we find manifestations of that violent alternation of mood, the unmodulated transition from gay to grave, that Lowell was never quite able to control. He dwells upon the sad death of a classmate with an Euripidean insistency of sorrow that goes ill with the sportive context; he would have gained in both pathos and poetry by a finer reserve. Finally, in the notes — elucidative, argumentative, analogical — which Lowell appended to the poem we find no uncertain premonition of that piece of Parson Wilbur in him which, fortunately for us, he was never wholly to lose.

3. *Storm and Stress.*

Lowell's first two years out of college were the most troubled and unhappy of his life. Yet, though they are not devoid of romantic incident and significant expression, it is possible to deal with them briefly, for while the happenings that occurred in them were momentous to him, they were not peculiar to him. They were, indeed, as he himself confessed late in his life, the familiar phenomena which attach themselves to

the spectacle of a young man of sensibility growing his shell.

The external and exciting causes of Lowell's perturbations in these years were, as is usually the case, two: an unhappy love affair, and trouble in finding his true work. So early as 1837 Lowell had become enamoured of a beautiful young woman of uncommon graces of mind, who was an intimate of the Lowell household. He seems to have pushed his boyish suit with all the ardor of his temperament, and, for a season, to have prospered in it. But about the time of his graduation a constraint of some sort arose between them. Whether Lowell's sense of the insecurity of his career tied his tongue, or whether some more subtle predicament of the fate that enmeshes young lovers involved him, is not clear. It is plain at any rate that Lowell considered his hopes irretrievably at an end. Thence onward for two years his letters constantly recur to this sorrow. Even allowing for the natural dramatizing instinct of such a temperament as his, it is clear that the ground-swell of this gale of passion shook the very foundations of his life. Not until the true Juliet came did the regret for his Rosaline find surcease.

The choice of a profession was for Lowell no easy matter. A love of preaching was in his blood, yet his father's profession was closed to

him by his inability to go all the way with the dogmas of any church. Literature, toward which all his inclinations tended, seemed scarcely to promise any consistent career and livelihood. At that time in America it was not recognized as a profession, and the shrewd practical difficulties which confront a young man deliberately choosing it to-day were a hundredfold greater in Lowell's time. Yet he felt strongly the obligation of self-support from the first; and when in 1839 his father lost most of his comfortable personal property under peculiarly distressing circumstances and became "land-poor," this obligation grew imperative. Thus it came about that for five years, from 1837 to 1842, Lowell considered the law as his chosen pursuit.

In his last year at Harvard he writes to Shackford with his characteristic half-whimsical note that he intends to study law and "shall probably be Chief Justice of the United States." At his graduation he tried to obtain permission from his father to pursue his legal studies in Germany, whither a few ambitious American youths were beginning to turn for a life that must have seemed, from the point of view of an American college of those days, rich in various interest and opportunity. Dr. Lowell, however, quite properly refused his consent, and a few weeks after the final exercises at Harvard we find our poet, like

so many another, applying himself to Coke and Blackstone at the Dane College Law School.

For nearly a year his letters are a record of vacillation. A month after he begins his law studies he decides to abandon them for business. But on his way into town to look for a place, he hears Webster make a speech in court, and forthwith returns to the law. Anon he has "quitted the law forever," and tries lecturing; but after receiving four dollars, less expenses, for an address in Concord, and finding a few weeks of service as substitute clerk in a coal-dealer's office quite enough, he again buckles down to his digests and commentaries. After a time, however, he "begins to like the law," and from the summer of 1839 onward he keeps to his studies with a fair diligence, though he confides to his friend Loring that he never expects to practice law as a profession. He has a feeling that he will do "something literary," and adds: "If I don't marry — and I hardly think I shall — it will take but little to support me, and when I wanted a decent dinner I could go to one of my opulent friends."

However mild and of the *haec-olim-meminisse-juvabit* order these woes may seem in the retrospect, they were very real to Lowell. Disappointed love, and the sense of inability to find his work, coming together just as he was cut off

from the so various and irresponsible interests of his college days, wrought in his yet ill-balanced temperament to give him moments of profound discouragement. There were times when the walls of his mind were wholly hung with black. Thirty years later he wrote: —

"I remember in '39 putting a cocked pistol to my forehead and being afraid to pull the trigger."

Yet even here, one suspects that it was not fear that intervened, but that invincible sense of humor which even in the most tragical of his letters rarely fails to give a pale flicker, and more often turns the whole to merriment at the end.

Yet throughout those stormy and distressful years Lowell's character was ripening and his genius was taking its proper bent. The record of his reading is increasingly significant. He still considers Ovid "the most poetical of the Roman poets," doubtless because of the sentimentalism there is in him, yet his taste is obviously maturing. He buys and reads an anthology containing the work of Hesiod, Theocritus, and Moschus, with a Latin translation. He reads the Greek dramatists. Above all he reads with the keenest gusto the old English dramatists, "so nimble and so full of subtle flame," and the poetics of Sidney and Puttenham, and he fills his common-

place book with pregnant passages. In January, 1839, he writes to Loring that he is shaping his theory of poetry.

The growth of Lowell's humanitarianism in these two years is no less marked; and this is important as showing that Lowell's humanitarian impulses did not, as some have thought, all but wholly take their rise from his engagement to his first wife. His note-book for 1838–1839 is full of passages about slavery, and so early as November, 1838, he writes, again to Loring, "I am fast becoming ultra-democratic;" and of the Manchester riots, "It almost brings tears to my eyes when I think of this vast multitude starved, trampled upon, meeting to petition the government which oppressed them, and which they supported by taxes wrung out of the very children's life blood." At the end of the same letter he says, "The abolitionists are the only ones with whom I sympathize of the present extant parties."

Lowell's study of literature and poetics, and his fast ripening humanitarianism, were accompanied by a growing impulse towards poetic creation. Early in 1839 he writes to a friend, "I sometimes actually *need* to write somewhat in verse." He did write a rather copious somewhat, with — as his letters show — a constantly increasing sense of the initial poetic impulse, as

well as of control over his medium. In May, 1839, he printed his "Threnody on an Infant," in the "Southern Literary Messenger," over the initials H. P. (Hugh Perceval). This was the first of the long series of poems that Lowell contributed to the "Messenger," at that time the chief support of the nest of American singing birds, in those years so numerous and noisy. It is clear that actual poetic expression in public print was a great encouragement to Lowell, and did much to help him struggle out of the dark wood in which he had been astray. His letters begin at once to be full of literary plans and proposals, and grow constantly happier and less subjective.

It was not long, too, before he found — like others who have been astray in similar forests — a Beatific Lady to lead him finally to the high road of life. On December 2, 1839, Lowell wrote to Loring: —

". . . I went up to Watertown on Saturday with W. A. White, a classmate, and spent the Sabbath with him. You ought to see his father! The most perfect specimen of a bluff, honest, hospitable country squire you can possibly imagine. His mother, too, is a very pleasant woman — a sister of Mrs. Gilman. His sister is a very pleasant and pleasing young lady, and knows more poetry than any one I am acquainted with.

I mean, she is able to repeat more. She is more familiar, however, with modern poets than with the pure well-springs of English poesy."

A subtilely-inquiring mind will detect in this sudden warm interest in Mr. and Mrs. White symptoms of a more profound interest in that "pleasant and pleasing young lady," their daughter. Lowell seems at once to have fallen deeply in love with Maria White. After an exalted wooing of some seven months, in the old house at Watertown, at Nantasket, at Cambridge, they became engaged in August, 1840, just as Lowell took his bachelor's degree in law. In Lowell's correspondence at this time everything is "glorious." A new Heaven and a new Earth lie open before him. He has at last pronounced the Everlasting Yea.

CHAPTER II

POET AND ABOLITIONIST

1840–1853

1. *Early Ventures.*

With his engagement to Maria White in his twenty-second year, Lowell entered upon the first flowering time of his poetic life. It was to be nearly five years before the narrow circumstances of the young couple would suffer them to marry; but so close was the bond between them, and so intimate was their affection, that in considering the influence of Maria White in Lowell's career, the years of their engagement and the years of their married life together may be considered as one period.

Maria White, by the testimony of all who knew her, and by the witness of the portraits which have been preserved, was a girl of delicate, pale beauty, and of a rare mind and character. She possessed that quaint New England union of a transcendental exaltation of mood with shrewd domestic wisdom that was so often seen among the liegemen and liegewomen of

Emerson. Like most young persons in those days, she wrote poetry, but of a vastly better fibre than the generality. The slender volume of her selected verse which was privately printed by Lowell in 1855, two years after her death, reveals the qualities of mind which proved so stimulating and supporting to her poet-lover. All of her verse has the simple and unlabored accent which gives distinction; yet along with the customary transcendentalism of those times, it is informed with a strain of fantastic sombre imagination that queerly recalls the visions of Beddoes and James Thomson. The reader who goes to her verse to-day will find in it not a few images as memorable as that wherewith she concludes her poem entitled "Africa," in which the dark continent is symbolized as a great black figure of eternal sadness: —

> "Her great lips closed upon her moan;
> Silently sate she on her throne,
> Rigid and black as carved in stone."

She had, too, an odd vein of musical phantasmagoria that suggests her reading of Coleridge and De Quincey. Her "Opium Phantasy," with its recurrent motif, —

> "Like silver balls, that, softly dropped,
> Ring into Golden Bowls,"

has the true drowsy magic.

It is impossible to doubt that the inclination of his lady toward glamourie and mystical imagery fostered that bent in the same direction that Lowell had received from his mother. But this is only a minor matter, compared with the resurgence of trust in his own powers which came to him from the worshipful love of so rare a woman. How high was her faith in him, and how great were the emprises to which she urged him, may be seen in such lines as these from one of her sonnets: —

> "I love thee for thyself — thyself alone;
> For that great soul whose breath most full and rare
> Shall to humanity a message bear,
> Flooding their dreary waste with organ tone."

Scarcely less potent than the influence of Maria White herself upon Lowell's mind was that of the curiously compact group of young people, self-styled "the Band," to which she introduced him. In the life of the Band, the elements of "wish-I-dared" and "Edwards-on-the-Will," to which reference has already been made, were about equally mingled. Wholly to grasp the temper of the Band, it is important to realize the mood of that eager transcendental time. This is nowhere better presented than in that engaging picture of it as it seemed to Lowell's riper vision in his essay on Thoreau: —

"*Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile!* was shouted

on all hands with every variety of emphasis, and by voices of every conceivable pitch, representing the three sexes of men, women, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagues. The nameless eagle of the tree Ygdrasil was about to sit at last, and wild-eyed enthusiasts rushed from all sides, each eager to thrust under the mystic bird that chalk egg from which the new and fairer Creation was to be hatched in due time. *Redeunt Saturnia regna*, — so far was certain, though in what shape or by what methods was still a matter of debate. Every possible form of intellectual and physical dyspepsia brought forth its gospel. Bran had its prophets, and the presartorial simplicity of Adam its martyrs, tailored impromptu from the tar-pot by incensed neighbors, and sent forth to illustrate the 'feathered Mercury,' as defined by Webster and Worcester. Plainness of speech was carried to a pitch that would have taken away the breath of George Fox; and even swearing had its evangelists, who answered a simple inquiry after their health with an elaborate ingenuity of imprecation that might have been honorably mentioned by Marlborough in general orders. Everybody had a mission (with a capital M) to attend to everybody-else's business. No brain but had its private maggot, which must have found pitiably short commons sometimes. Not a few impecu-

nious zealots abjured the use of money (unless earned by other people), professing to live on the internal revenues of the spirit. Some had an assurance of instant millennium so soon as hooks and eyes should be substituted for buttons. Communities were established where everything was to be common but common sense. Men renounced their old gods, and hesitated only whether to bestow their furloughed allegiance on Thor or Budh. Conventions were held for every hitherto inconceivable purpose. The belated gift of tongues, as among the Fifth Monarchy men, spread like a contagion, rendering its victims incomprehensible to all Christian men; whether equally so to the most distant possible heathen or not was unexperimented, though many would have subscribed liberally that a fair trial might be made. It was the Pentecost of Shinar. The day of utterances reproduced the day of rebuses and anagrams, and there was nothing so simple that uncial letters and the style of Diphilus the Labyrinth could not turn it into a riddle. Many foreign revolutionists out of work added to the general misunderstanding their contribution of broken English in every most ingenious form of fracture. All stood ready at a moment's notice to reform everything but themselves. The general motto was: —

> 'And we 'll *talk* with them, too,
> And take upon 's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies.'"

This welter of the "New Thought" that then was represents the mood of the Band but roughly. They were too youthfully gay, too earnest for the actual best in literature and life, to go very far with its vagaries; yet their young dreams and ambitions were clearly colored by it. Miss White's beauty and Lowell's own, — he is described at that time as "slight and small, with rosy cheeks and starry eyes and wavy hair parted in the middle," — together with the growing repute of his poetry and the romantic dignity of their love affair, — made them prominent figures in the circle, and to the sympathetic, intense, slightly fevered thrill of the Band Lowell's excitable genius owed an intense activity.

The first beneficent result of Lowell's association with the Band was to afford him an appreciative audience for his high-spirited wit, and thus to help him still further out of the shadows in which he had been living for three years, by encouraging him to give free rein again to those incredibly boyish ebullitions of fun which were to be throughout his life both his blessing and his bane. His early letters are full of the joy of this joking. He writes, for example, in December, 1841, to W. A. White: —

"I have just come from spending the evening at ——'s (where Maria is making sunshine just now), and have been exceedingly funny. I have in the course of the evening recited near upon five hundred extempore macaronic verses; composed and executed an oratorio and opera (entirely unassisted and, à la Beethoven, on a piano without any strings, to wit the centre table); besides drawing an entirely original view of Nantasket Beach with the different groups from Worrick's disporting themselves thereon, and a distant view of the shipping in the harbor, compiled from the shipping news of our indefatigable friend Ballard, of the 'Daily,' and making a temperance address; giving vent, moreover, to innumerable jests, jokes, puns, oddities, quiddities, and nothings, interrupted by my own laughter and that of my hearers; and eating an indefinite number of raisins, chesnuts (I advisedly omit the 't'), etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., . . ." [1]

The second beneficent influence of the Band upon Lowell came from the opportunity which it gave him to enlarge upon his literary likings and plans to a sympathetic and admiring circle. A member of the Band has recorded, for instance, that for many months Lowell could talk of little save Shakespeare's sonnets, which he read ill

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 79.

but impressively. It is not perhaps necessary for us to take the "ill" very seriously, for there are few men of sensibility who fancy another man's manner of cantillating verse, but it is easy to appreciate how much this communication in bee-bread contributed to his poetic growth. Perhaps the chief favorites of the Band were Keats and Tennyson. Lowell's letters at this time are full of Keats, whom he considers "one of the old Titan brood," and there has recently come to light a manuscript volume in Lowell's hand containing some of the early poems of Tennyson, which seems to have been passed about among the members of the Band.

But while these interesting young people reasoned together of poetry, they certainly did not neglect the verses of their king and queen, and the effect of this genial and responsive atmosphere is clearly seen in the sudden exuberance of Lowell's literary plans. Throughout these years he is continually writing to his friends, with something a little like braggadocio, that he does not need sympathy. Thus he says in 1842: "I do not need it [encouragement] having been always blessed with a self-sustaining nature" — and a few years later: — "I am *teres atque rotundus*, a microcosm in myself, my own author, public, critic, and posterity, and care for no other." But this is rather the half-willful self-de-

ception of a sensitive nature than a true expression of the facts of his mind. Reading his letters of that time one discovers in almost every line of them evidence of his dependence upon the encouragement and sympathy of Maria White and the Band, and of the impulse he derived from them. In 1840 he is going to write a tragedy, — "psycho-historical I think — *I know* it will be good;" — also a prose tale — a kind of Cantabrigian "Sorrows of Werther" for serial publication in the "Messenger;" and he writes to Loring, "If I don't die, George, you will be proud of me." A year later he is "going to write an American tragedy on the trial of Anne Hutchinson, who was condemned for heresy in the good old colony times," and we hear of a life of Keats among multitudinous other ventures, — which were never to be anything else than the numerous dream-progeny of his brain.

The third and most important beneficent influence of the Band upon Lowell's life was in quickening, deepening, and defining his humanitarian impulses. In this direction, of course, it but seconded and supported the influence of Maria White. But a sense of the fellowship of ideals which came to Lowell from the sympathy of the circle seems to have solidified his impulses in a way that would scarcely have been possible from the inspiration of a single girl, even were she so

remarkable a person as Miss White. As we have already seen, Lowell's abolitionism did not begin wholly with his engagement; but it certainly took no form more definite than a somewhat vague velleity until the summer and fall of 1840. Indeed it could not well have been otherwise, for only through some profound emotional experience could a Lowell become heartily allied with a movement apparently so quixotic as the anti-slavery cause was in the last years of the '30's, — the years within which Whittier was mobbed at Concord, New Hampshire, and Garrison was still a young man, "friendless and unseen."

By the autumn of 1840, however, Lowell was generally known to be a whole-hearted adherent of the abolition cause. It was apparently about that time that he wrote upon the cover of the class poem in which he had so gayly derided the abolitionists: —

> "Behold the baby arrows of that wit
> Wherewith I dared assail the woundless Truth!
> Love hath refilled the quiver and with it
> The man shall win atonement for the youth."

And in November, 1840, he was a member of the Chardon Street Anti-Slavery Convention. From this time on his poems and his letters are full of the slavery question. The most significant utterances are to be found in his letters to his Virginian friend and classmate, Frank Heath,

a young man of unusual personal charm and accomplishment, whose extraordinary abilities were a tradition among his old Cambridge circle long after he had disappeared from their sight. Lowell writes to him very earnestly and at great length trying to persuade him to join the anti-slavery ranks. To the Virginian Lowell's logic must have seemed less convincing than the feeling which lay under it, for as a dialectician Lowell in those days was not at his best. Toward the close of one of his letters to Heath he breaks out: "I cannot reason on the subject. A man who is in the right can never reason. He can only affirm;" and again: "My heart whirls and tosses like a maelstrom when I think of it."

The momentum of Lowell's new love-born humanitarianism urged him into other reforms of which a few years before he had been the derisive satirist. He even appears, somewhat oddly, considering his earlier and later views, in the rôle of a temperance lecturer and advocate of women's suffrage. Writing to Loring in July, 1842, he gives a curious account of a presentation by Miss White of a banner to the "Watertown Washington Total Abstinence Society," and of his own remarks before the Cambridgeport Woman's Total Abstinence Association upon a similar occasion: —

"I was called out, and made a speech of about

ten minutes on the top of a bench to an audience of two thousand, as silent as could be. I spoke of the beauty of having women present, and of their influence and interest in reforms. I ended with the following sentiment, 'The proper place of woman at the head of the Pilgrims back to Purity and Truth.' In the midst of my speech I heard many demonstrations of satisfaction and approval — one voice saying 'Good!' in quite an audible tone. I was told that my remarks were 'just the thing.' When I got up and saw the crowd it inspired me. I felt as calm as I do now, and could have spoken an hour with ease. I did not hesitate for a word or expression even once." [1] It is clear from such records as this that Lowell's democratic sympathies, as well as the character of his new friends, were separating him slowly yet perceptibly from the "Brahmin" caste to which by inheritance he belonged. Yet his taste and culture were always marked by something of the old school. Hence arose a division and conflict in his interior as well as exterior life, with results which were, as we shall see, not always happy for his natural development.

Finally, in considering young Lowell's inner life as it was affected by his engagement, his association with the Band, and his growing poetic impulse, we must note the peculiar development

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 91.

in him at this time of a conscious mysticism. Writing to Heath of the insidious corruption of sensualism, he says significantly: "The body never thickens *outward*, but always inward." And Lowell himself seems at this time to have been much concerned to prevent in his own case the inward thickening of the flesh. This could not have been a very bitter fight for a young man of Lowell's nature and intellectual constitution, who, at the age when most poets are having their taste of *la vie de Bohême* or else undergoing the rigors of a half-monkish retirement, was engaged to a noble woman, and bound in a fellowship of humanitarian ideals to a band of young New England men and maidens. But whatever the fight may have been, he was helped in it by a succession of those experiences of "gustation" and ecstasy wherewith so many poets and mystics have believed themselves to be blessed. Lowell's own account of this sheds too clear a light upon the character of his imagination to be passed over. Writing to Loring in September, 1842, he thus describes one of the first of these experiences: —

"I had a revelation last Friday evening. I was at Mary's, and happening to say something of the presence of spirits (of whom, I said, I was often dimly aware), Mr. Putnam entered into an argument with me on spiritual matters. As I

was speaking the whole system rose up before me like a vague Destiny looming from the abyss. I never before so clearly felt the spirit of God in me and around me. The whole room seemed to me full of God. The air seemed to waver to and fro with the presence of Something, I knew not what. I spoke with the calmness and clearness of a prophet.

"I cannot tell you what this revelation was. I have not yet studied it enough. But I shall perfect it one day, and then you shall hear it and acknowledge its grandeur. It embraces all other systems." [1]

In one of Lowell's note-books, apparently that for 1842, there is a faintly penciled line that cries from the blurred page with a startling vehemence, "My heart beats like the trampling of a host." There speaks the real Lowell of those early years.

But we have paused perhaps too long over the momentous impulses that were moving in Lowell's mind in the two years from 1840 to 1842. It is time to return and take up again the narrative of the external events of his life. When in 1840 young Lowell attained his majority, took his bachelor's degree in law, and contracted an engagement of marriage, his prospects were far

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 96.

from bright, and for the four years following his struggle for self-support was too keen to make it possible for him to entertain the idea of marriage. After completing his course at the Law School, he entered the law office of Mr. C. G. Loring in Boston, and soon went into town to live. Though he seems to have had an impecunious client or two, his career as a barrister was quite traditionally briefless, and he employed himself during office hours chiefly in writing verse. Throughout 1840 he had been a frequent contributor in verse to the "Southern Literary Messenger," which, unfortunately, did not pay for poetical contributions. Now he looked about for a more profitable market, and in 1841 began to send verse to "Graham's Magazine," which paid him a small but very acceptable honorarium. In this year, too, partly to please himself, partly to please and surprise his father, but more largely to make a fit offering to Miss White, he signalized the beginning of his practice at the bar by publishing a volume of verse.

"A Year's Life" appeared with the familiar motto, "Ich habe gelebt und geliebet," upon the title-page, in the late autumn of 1840, though it bears the date 1841. Of the poetic achievement of this volume there will be occasion to speak further on. Its actual poetic substance was not very great, and of the poems in the volume there

were but a mere handful that Lowell ever cared to reprint. It was full of his deep mystic joy in his love, of that renascence of wonder at the various world of which Lowell was one of the chief representatives in America, of beautiful if somewhat nebulous images, and there were in it numerous traces of his new dream of human brotherhood. Two of the poems, "Irené," and "My Love," were poetry of the first water. In their twofold inspiration, Lowell's love for Maria White and his reading of Jeremy Taylor's sermon in praise of the Countess of Carberry, they were typical of the mingled passion and bookishness of all of his best poetry. But Lowell in 1840 was as yet an imperfect and intermittent master of his art. Although the reader is constantly aware of the inspiration of the author, his poetic moods are but ineffectively mediated, and we bring away from the volume only an impression of wandering airs and a memory of star dust.

For all that, the volume was, as volumes of verse went in those days of sentimentality and facile singing, a notable one. The prismatic mist in which the reader of it found himself was not unlike that which envelops one in the early poems of Tennyson and of Shelley, though Lowell nowhere in it showed quite the subtle artistry of the one, or the fervid, consistent

Utopianism of the other. If in one sense it was an esoteric book for the lover, his lady, and the Band, in another it was a significant expression of the mood of those times in New England. At any rate, it was praised without reserve by friendly reviewers. "Graham's Magazine" hailed the author as the herald of a new school, at once "humanitarian and idealistic." Nor was the poetic repute that came to Lowell after the publication of this volume confined to the circle of his literary acquaintance. So active were his friends, indeed, that he was, as Willis said, "the best launched poet of his time;" and he seems to have enjoyed an immediate prestige that few poets achieve. When he was known only by this first volume and a few magazine poems, Bayard Taylor, then but seventeen and remote from the Cambridge circle, was "enthusiastic" over him, and a little later the "New York Tribune" said of him that he was "well and widely known as one of the most gifted and promising poets in America."

However, but a few hundred copies of "A Year's Life" were sold, and the proceeds from its sale, with the addition of an occasional honorarium for a poem in "Graham's," did not go very far toward Lowell's support. He cast about for other markets. In May, 1842, he printed in "The United States Magazine and Democratic Re-

view" the six characteristic sonnets, afterwards reprinted as "On Reading Wordsworth's Sonnets in Defence of Capital Punishment." For the "Dial" he wrote three sonnets over his initials, "The Frankness of Nature," "The Poet's Obedience," and "To Irené on Her Birthday;" and possibly two other sonnets signed Hugh Peters may be his. But the "Boston Miscellany," edited by Nathan Hale, who had been his youthful associate in the editorship of "Harvardiana," was for a year his chief medium of publication. To the "Miscellany" Lowell contributed a few poems, among them the fine ode beginning "In the old days of awe and keen-eyed wonder," and a considerable number of prose pieces, which, without possessing much permanent merit, are of uncommon interest as the first specimens of his production in the form by which he is now perhaps most commonly remembered. The variety of these papers is considerable. There are several slight, fantastic sketches, "The First Client," "Married Men," "Getting Up," "Disquisition on Foreheads,"[1] which show a pleasant vein of discursive humor and sentiment in the

[1] In Lowell's note-book for 1841–42 there are suggestions for other essays, which, if written, would doubtless have gone with this group. Some of the more suggestive titles are: *An Essay on the Philosophical Causes of the Fact that Italians always Suffer in Convulsions of Nature, An Essay on Owls,* and *A Parody on Romantic Stories.*

manner that was then in vogue; but these are more remarkable for the easy copiousness of their production than for any perdurable quality. The literary essays, on the other hand, have more significance. There are four essays upon the Elizabethan dramatists, Chapman, Webster, Ford, and Massinger, which show how keen at this time was Lowell's taste for those brave translunary things which were all his life his favorite reading. He gives little attention to the criticism of dramatic structure, or to the more ideal implications of tragic meaning. The essays are very largely made up of quotations from the authors under discussion, surrounded by enthusiastic exposition and appreciation; but the extracts are always chosen with excellent taste, and Lowell's gift for transmitting to the reader a lively sense of the author's personality is very clearly shown. Perhaps the best of the four is the paper on Chapman, which contains a notable plea for calling things by their right names, — a spade a spade, etc. This was always a way of Lowell's, but his plea was particularly apt at that time when it was but a step from the labored and ostentatious frankness of the new thinkers to preciosity and timorous periphrase; when Helen Maria Williams, for example, spoke of the Church of Rome as the "dissolute of Babylon;" and when Lowell's ears must have been daily

provoked by a kind of mincing in linguistic matters which is still not unknown in newer Boston.

But more interesting than any of Lowell's papers in the "Miscellany" is that on Song-Writing, written about this time and published the following February in the second number of "The Pioneer." Here we find something very unlike this plea for plain speech, which again discloses that characteristic duality in his nature which we shall never cease to observe. Lowell's theory of song-writing is informed by a kind of mystic humanism which sometimes scatters into a misty cataract of words, but it is full of paragraphs that reveal the heart of the young poet better, perhaps, than anything to be found elsewhere in his early prose, not even excepting his intimate letters. How clearly, for example, do we get the quality of his mind in such sincere, highflown passages as this: "We love to hear wonderful men talk of themselves because they are better worth hearing about than anything else, and because what we learn of them is not so much a history of self as a history of nature." Or this, which is still nearer, as some may think, to the intense inane: "True poetry is but the perfect reflex of true knowledge, and true knowledge is spiritual knowledge, which comes only of love, and which, when it has solved the mystery of one, even the smallest effluence of the eternal beauty,

which surrounds us like an atmosphere, becomes a clue leading to the heart of this seeming labyrinth." Yet in all these Platonic flights, Lowell is constantly returning, as was the wont of the Transcendentalists, to his actual New England world. We have as the application of the passage just quoted this charming sentence, which he was afterward to make use of in "The Courtin'," perhaps the most nearly perfect of his poems: "The modest loveliness of Dorcas has revealed to the heart of Reuben countless other beauties of which, but for her, he had been careless."

It is clear from what we have seen of Lowell's mood in these years, as it was determined by his love and by his friendships, as it found expression in his verse and in his prose, that he was in no way to succeed as a lawyer. He felt more and more the restraint of his cribbed and cabined position, and in the autumn of 1842 he at last made up his mind to abandon it. As he wrote, "I cannot write well here in this cramped up lawyer's office, feeling all the time that I am giving the lie to my destiny and wasting time which might be gaining me the love of thousands." At the end of 1842 he forsook the law, this time indeed forever, and undertook the perilous adventure of founding the great American magazine.

The particular great American magazine that Lowell undertook to launch was "The Pioneer." He associated with himself in the enterprise Mr. Robert Carter, a young man of Cambridge, who had already had some slight experience in newspaper and magazine work, and the two undertook to be both editors and proprietors of a periodical which should be at once the most intellectual and the most readable that America had seen. "The Pioneer" was to be published for the proprietors by Leland & Whiting of Boston, to whom they contracted to furnish five thousand copies on the 20th of each month, under penalty of a fine of five hundred dollars in case of failure. The prospectus of "The Pioneer," written doubtless by Lowell, is highly characteristic. Witness this paragraph: —

"The object of the subscribers in establishing 'The Pioneer' is to furnish the intelligent and reflecting portion of the reading public with a rational substitute for the enormous quantity of thrice-diluted trash in the shape of namby-pamby love tales and sketches which is monthly poured out to them by many of our popular magazines, — and to offer instead thereof a healthy and manly Periodical Literature, whose perusal will not necessarily involve a loss of time and a deterioration of every moral and intellectual faculty.

"The critical department of 'The Pioneer' will be conducted with great care and impartiality, and while satire and personality will be sedulously avoided, opinions of merit or demerit will be candidly and fearlessly expressed."

Whoever has had the curiosity to peruse any volumes of "Gleason's Pictorial Fireside Companion" or "Godey's Lady Book," perhaps two of the most popular magazines of those days, will appreciate the peculiar merit of this prospectus. Lowell's hopes for the magazine were high, and he had that dream of making it an institution rather than a business which has brought so many brave editorial argosies to wreck. He wrote to Whittier: "If the undertaking succeeds, I shall pay authors higher than any other magazine in the land, regarding things and not names, and paying for an article's worth in spirit rather than its current value in specie."

The first number of "The Pioneer" appeared in January, 1843, with a motto from Bacon: "Reform, therefore, without heresy or scandal of former times and persons; but set it down to thyself as well to create good precedents as to follow them." It contained a spirited opening editorial by Lowell, pleading not for a *national* literature but for a *natural* literature; and the number as a whole was an excellent one. That and the two succeeding issues contained contri-

butions by Hawthorne, Dr. T. W. Parsons, Poe, Mrs. Browning (then Miss Barrett), W. W. Story, John S. Dwight, Jones Very, and John Neal, not to mention others of less eminence. It was admirably printed, and, barring some marginal embellishment in the florid taste of the time, it was admirably illustrated, with a few excellent engravings in each number.

The life of "The Pioneer," however, was briefer than even a skeptical observer would have anticipated. Hardly was the first number printed before Lowell became afflicted with a serious eye trouble, and on the 10th of January, 1843, he went to New York for treatment by a Dr. Elliott, the foremost oculist of his time. Carter seems not to have possessed quite the energy and optimism of his young chief, and although Lowell did what he could from New York to get each number of the magazine through the press on time, the March number was eight days late. The publishers claimed the forfeit of five hundred dollars, but finally offered to waive it if the contract should be so changed as to require them to take only so many copies as they might reasonably expect to sell. As a result, the credit of the editors was impaired, and they were obliged to stop printing. They were left with a considerable debt, both to printers and contributors, of which Lowell's personal share reached the respectable

sum of $1800. He felt the blow keenly, for apart from the burden of debt, the discontinuance of a magazine which had started with such high aims and had drawn together so notable a body of contributors was a bitter disappointment to him.

Lowell's brief editorial experience on "The Pioneer," together with his stay in New York, did him much service in enlarging his acquaintance among men of letters and in giving him a recognized standing among them. He was unable to use his eyes while in New York more than a little time each day, and he seems to have employed his leisure in making the acquaintance of many of the litterateurs of the "metropolitan circle." He saw something of N. P. Willis, but Charles F. Briggs, better known at that time as "Harry Franco," was the chief of these new acquaintances. He was to be a lifelong friend of Lowell's, and as an editor and critic did much to blow abroad the fame of his poet friend. Lowell also frequented the studio of William Page, the painter, whom he had met some time before at Nantasket. Page and Lowell were both men of a mystical, enthusiastic imagination, and each seems to have brought to the other something of the quickening impulse of his own art. W. J. Stillman wrote of their friendship, at a time a little later than this: —

"I used to visit the studio of William Page, the poet's intimate friend and ardent admirer, to whose almost inspired (oracular certainly) improvisations on art and poetry I used to listen till my own blood ran quick and my own enthusiasm made me see what was never to be seen again, even in dreams. Page used to repeat Lowell's poems with his own commentary, so subtly fantastic at times that it made me think he had taken part in the composition of the poet's text, or thought he had, at least."

The chief immediate results of this friendship were that for a time Page seems to have made Lowell's poems more picturesque, while Lowell made Page's pictures more poetic; that the volume of poems published at the end of 1843 was dedicated to Page; and that Page painted Lowell's portrait, and exhibited it in New York in the spring.

Page's familiar portrait of Lowell is a sad and shadowy likeness, much idealized, in which the poet is given a wide Elizabethan collar and hair sweeping his shoulders. It hardly seems like the same man depicted in the daguerreotypes of the time, which show a ruddy, compact, carefully clothed young man, not ill-content with himself. But no reader of his poetry and letters written at this time can doubt that the alchemy of the painter threw upon the canvas a better present-

ment of the real Lowell than the chemistry of the sun had printed upon the daguerreotypist's plate.

Lowell went back to Cambridge, where he was now established again at Elmwood, at the end of February, 1843. For the remainder of the year he seems to have been chiefly engaged in preparing for the press a volume of poems which was to appear in December, 1843, though dated 1844. The domestic life in those days at Elmwood was sorrowful. Mrs. Lowell's mind was now completely disordered, and Rebecca Lowell, our author's oldest sister, had begun to show the first signs of mental oddity and disease. During the four days of the week which his father spent in Boston, it was necessary for Lowell to remain uninterruptedly in the house with his sister and mother. His chief supports in this year seem to have been his poetic expression and the company of Maria White, who was living in her father's house at Watertown, a half-hour's walk distant. In September of 1843 he made a brief vacation trip to Bangor, but with the exception of this excursion he seems not to have left Elmwood for many months.

At the end of the year appeared Lowell's "Poems," first series, with the imprint of John Owen, Cambridge. In this volume, which was made up chiefly of his poetic work since the pub-

lication of "A Year's Life," in 1841, we get for the first time a clear foreshadowing of the range, variety, and tone of his mature poetry. Nearly all the poems in the volume are in some sense autobiographic. The burden of them, however, is perhaps expressed most clearly in the sonnet written upon his twenty-fourth birthday, which he never reprinted: —

> "Now have I quite passed by that cloudy If
> That darkened the wild hope of my boyish days,"

so it begins; and two lines below we find: —

> "Now doth love's sun my soul with splendor fill,
> And hope hath struggled upward into power."

Apart from the greater precision and resonance of tone in this volume, two things are especially notable. For the first time since his class poem and his old familiar letters in verse, Lowell's whimsicality begins to sparkle through the texture of his poetry. This seems to show that he is beginning to be sufficiently master of the form to be able to express his real self in it, whereas at the time of the publication of "A Year's Life" the act of composition never failed to throw him into a mood of artificial sadness, as of an old lion or a lover's lute. The second notable thing in the volume for our present purpose is the prevalence in it of poems dealing with the moral and political issues of the hour.

It contains a few wholly personal lyrics, a few narrative poems upon classical or mediæval subjects, like "Rhœcus" and "A Legend of Brittany," where the inspiration is purely poetic and artistic; but the bulk of the volume is of poems like "Prometheus," "A Glance Behind the Curtain," or "On Reading Wordsworth's Sonnets in Defence of Capital Punishment," in which Lowell takes no wavering stand as one of the "poets militant below."

The reception of the "Poems" was gratifying to Lowell and Miss White. Margaret Fuller, to be sure, found them "absolutely wanting in the true spirit and tone of poesy;" and added in her decided way, with its curious echo of the accent of Macaulay, "His interest in the moral questions of the day has supplied the want of vitality in himself; his great facility of versification has enabled him to fill the ear with a copious stream of pleasant sound. But his verse is stereotyped: his thoughts sound no depth, and posterity will not remember him." But the majority of the reviewers gave the "Poems" unbridled praise. In a little less than three months, eleven hundred copies of the book were sold, exclusive of an edition published in England by Mudie — no mean record for a volume of verse. Lowell's expenses at this time, living, as he did, at home, were slight; and the success of his book did

much to help him out of the embarrassment in which he had been placed by the failure of "The Pioneer," and made marriage at the end of the year begin to seem practicable. This was made to appear the more feasible by the fact that his connection with the anti-slavery movement began to yield him some return for his writings in verse and prose. Lowell was never in the extreme wing of the abolitionists. In the New England Anti-Slavery Convention held in Boston in May, 1844, in which a vote for disunion was carried 250 to 24, Lowell and Maria White voted "Nay." But his standing as the most effective poet, after Whittier, in the abolitionist party was constantly solidifying. In August, 1844, Whittier himself wrote to Lowell asking for a poem for an anti-slavery meeting in Salem, in such phrase as this: "Give me one that shall be to our cause what the song of Rouget de Lisle was to the French Republicans, — such a one as the maiden may whisper in the

> 'asphodel flower-fleece
> She walks ankle deep in,'

and the strong man may sing at his forge and plow."

By September of 1844 it had been definitely arranged that Lowell and Maria White should be married on the day after Christmas, and

should go at once to Philadelphia, where Lowell was to take the position of editorial writer on the staff of the "Pennsylvania Freeman."

Lowell spent the autumn of 1844 in preparing for the press his "Conversations on Some of the Old Poets," which was issued in December, bearing the date 1845. It was published in London by Clarke in the same year. A second American edition was soon called for, and it was reprinted again by Ticknor & Fields in 1862. From this time onward all of Lowell's books were successfully sold in England and went through numerous editions in this country. The "Conversations" is dedicated to his father, though the dedication confesses that the volume contains "many opinions from which he will wholly, yet with the large charity of a Christian heart, dissent." In the preface "To the Reader," Lowell states his view of the purpose of criticism very characteristically: "If some of the topics introduced seem foreign to the subject, I can only say that they are not so to my mind, and that an author's object in writing criticisms is not only to bring to light the beauties of the works he is considering, but also to express his own opinions upon those and other matters." Throughout the "Conversations" Lowell gives the "other matters" very plentiful attention. Indeed, he seems to have chosen the form of conversation

largely for the sake of freeing himself from the obligation of strict prose structure and to afford freer scope for excursus and expatiation; John and Philip, who are the hypothetical personages of the conversation, are but slightly differentiated, and the talk meanders at the author's will. As a matter of fact, Lowell, with a somewhat frugal mind, seems to have employed the "Conversations" for getting together pretty much everything that he had written in prose up to that time. A good part of the bulk of the volume is taken over with but slight revision from the papers in the "Miscellany." Many passages even are introduced from letters that Lowell had written two or three years before, and his Commonplace Books were drained of all their best.

Precisely for this reason, the volume of the "Conversations" is of considerable importance to the student of Lowell, showing as it does in compact compass the furnishing of his mind and the direction of his literary views in the years between 1840 and 1845. Its temper throughout is that of the young humanist. "Nothing," says Lowell in one place in it, "which ever had a meaning for mankind, loses it by the lapse of years," and his affair was to express from his favorite authors this old meaning. As a whole, the conversations are less of a florilegium than the essays in the "Miscellany." He still employs

admiring italics, and frequently goes aside to quote a favorite passage, even when it is not very germane to the matter in hand. Yet one will find many of his characteristic lifelong opinions and literary preferences set forth with no uncertain tone. Chaucer, Spenser, Chapman, Ford, Taylor, Donne, Marvel, and Keats are the authors with whom he is most concerned; though he even shows an acquaintance, remarkable for a young man in those times, with such out-of-the-way and shadowy figures as Barnaby Barnes and Blackmore. We find here, too, perhaps as a result of his stimulating intimacy with Page, a considerable amount of writing about the æsthetics of painting, and there are many allusions to the art not only of Page, but of Allston, Story, and Copley. There is an occasional defect of judgment, as where we are told that "Ovid is the truest poet among the Latins," but for the most part Lowell is here the lover of only the best in literature. In mood and style there are still not infrequent traces of mawkishness, but there are not wanting passages of sonorous and full-freighted prose.

On the day after Christmas, 1844, Lowell was married to Maria White. After a day or two at home, the young couple proceeded to Philadelphia, where Lowell at once took up his work as an

editorial writer for the "Pennsylvania Freeman." His stipend from the "Freeman" was incredibly small — only ten dollars a month. But at that time both Lowell and Maria Lowell were finding a constant market for verse in the "Broadway Journal," then just started and edited by their friend Briggs; and thus they were enabled to live. In a letter to Carter written in January, 1845, Lowell gives a charming picture of their health and happiness: —

"We have a little room in the third story (back) with white muslin curtains trimmed with evergreen, and are as happy as two mortals can be. I think Maria is better, I *know* I am, — in health I mean, in spirit we both are. She is gaining flesh and so am I, and my cheeks are grown so preposterously red that I look as though I had rubbed them against all the red brick walls in the city."

The "Pennsylvania Freeman," which had been edited at one time by Whittier, was largely controlled by the circle of Friends in Philadelphia. It was edited during the time of Lowell's connection with it by C. C. Burleigh and J. Miller McKim. To Lowell's ardent and poetic abolitionism the editorial policy of the "Freeman" seemed, as he complained, a little timorous and quietistic, and his writing in it did not prove so effective as his later work in the "National Anti-Slavery

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Standard." He contributed only a half-dozen editorials to the "Freeman," chiefly dealing with the slothfulness of the Church in its attitude toward reform. They were very earnest and right-hearted pieces of leader-writing, but not always editorially adroit, and, moreover, Lowell's mind and heart do not seem to have been altogether absorbed in his work. As he wrote to Briggs on February 15: "It is hard to write when one is first married. The Jews gave a man a year's vacation." So, for one reason or another, he does not seem altogether to have fulfilled the expectations of his editors.

On the whole, however, the Lowells' months in Philadelphia were extremely pleasant and profitable. They were thrown with a kindly and helpful circle of friends, some of whom, like Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Davis and the McKims, seem to have had more than a passing kindness for them, though there still lingers in Philadelphia among these families a tradition that young Lowell in 1845 talked Yankee, the dialect that was to be of Hosea Biglow, with too little interruption.

In May, 1845, Lowell's connection with the "Freeman" came to an end, and he journeyed leisurely homeward, stopping in New York to visit Briggs, and also to call on Poe, with whom he had had for some years a fervid but some-

what spasmodic correspondence. The latter he found, as Mrs. Clemm noted with pathetic regret, "not quite himself."

After their return from Philadelphia, Mr. and Mrs. Lowell settled in a suite of upper rooms at Elmwood, and this was their home during the eight years of their married life. On the last day of the year their first daughter, Blanche, was born there.

In the following year, 1846, Lowell's published work was for a professional man of letters surprisingly slight. Its sum total of printed production for the year was only five poems and five newspaper and magazine articles. The reason for this is easily to be seen in the variety and fullness of his domestic concerns in that year. Abijah White, father of Mrs. Lowell, had died in the September of 1845, and for a time it was thought that Mrs. Lowell's inheritance from the estate would be sufficient to give the young couple an independence. They even contemplated going at once to spend some time abroad. After the settlement, however, the inheritance shrank, as is the melancholy way of such things, until this was out of the question. It was, however, sufficient to give the Lowells a little greater sense of security, to enable them to spend the summer at Stockbridge, — where Longfellow

found our poet "hale as a young farmer," — and to take Lowell's mind for a time from his poetry. Furthermore, his life at this time was in every way too full and happy to leave him that craving for poetic expression which is more often the result of frustration than of attainment.

He is still a "man of feeling." So late as August, 1845, he wrote to Briggs: —

"My sorrows are not literary ones, but those of daily life. I pass through the world and meet with scarcely a response to the affectionateness of my nature. I believe Maria only knows how loving I am truly. Brought up in a very reserved and conventional family, I cannot in society appear what I really am. I go out sometimes with my heart so full of yearning toward my fellows that the indifferent look with which even entire strangers pass me brings tears into my eyes. And then to be looked upon by those who *do* know me (externally) as 'Lowell the poet' — it makes me sick. Why not Lowell the man, — the boy rather, — as Jemmy Lowell, as I was at school?"[1]

In 1846, however, Lowell had a more ample outlet for the affectionateness of his nature, and we hear little more of this half-morbid longing. How deep was his joy in his child can be discovered from nearly all his letters written at this

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 144.

time. Writing to Mr. Davis when Blanche was some four months old, he says: —

"Miss Blanche Lowell, in the freshness of her morning spirits, is, in my opinion, a sight well worth a journey from Philadelphia to look upon. Why, she laughs all over. You can see it through her clothes. The very tips of her toes twinkle for joy. And then there is not a chanticleer in my numerous flock who can compare with her for crowing. She has another grace which I might in modesty omit, but I love truth! She is exceedingly fond of her father."[1]

All the numerous accounts which have been written of Lowell's domestic establishment at this time show it to have been of idyllic, affectionate frugality. Lowell himself writes of his wife that she is always "cruising like Admiral Van Trump with a broom at her masthead," and Colonel T. W. Higginson has recorded how he called on the Lowells and found the baby rocked in a cradle made of half a barrel with the motto "*Puritas*, *Potestas*" painted upon the half of its head. Nor was Lowell the traditional inefficient literary person in the home. In February, 1846, he wrote to Briggs: —

"I never see Maria mending my stockings, or Ellen bringing the water for my showerbath in the morning, without hearing a faint tinkle of

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 156.

chains. Yet how avoid it? Maria laughs when I propose to learn darning, and Ellen flies into open rebellion and snatches the pail out of my hands when I would fain assume half of the old Israelitish drudgery, and become my own bearer of water. After prolonged controversy and diplomatic negotiation day after day on the cellar stairs, a treaty was concluded by which I was always to bring up my own coal, and yet on this very morning I surprised Ellen, in flagrant violation of the treaty, halfway upstairs on her way to my garret with a hodful." [1]

Thinking of such a home life as this, one can neither wonder at nor regret the paucity of Lowell's literary production in this year. He was not, however, wholly given up to his quiet happiness at home. He was frequently in Boston convening with the abolitionist circle there, and in February, March, April, and May, he wrote four able articles on anti-slavery in the United States for the "London Daily News." In May, 1846, Longfellow wrote in his journal: "Called to see Lowell this morning, and climbed to his celestial study, with its pleasant prospect through the small square windows, and its ceiling so low you can touch it with your hand. Read Donne's poems while he went down to feed his hens and chickens. We then discoursed of the abolition-

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 149.

ists for half an hour. He is very ardent on this topic." In June of that year he made an arrangement to contribute articles in prose and verse to the "National Anti-Slavery Standard." This was to be his main employment for nearly four years, though he did not become its corresponding editor until 1848.

Perhaps the most curious manifestation of the reform spirit in Lowell during this year was a significant correspondence with Oliver Wendell Holmes. Lowell's letters have not been preserved, but by the reply of Holmes which is printed in Morse's biography of him, the character of it may be discovered. Lowell seems to have written to Holmes in November, reproaching him with being a fainéant, and an obstructionist to all advanced notions of war, slavery, the claims of the poor, temperance, and reform in general. The future Autocrat replied with great propriety and dignity and a certain lurking humor. He was prepared to confess his negligence concerning some of the matters in Lowell's indictment, but went on to say concerning his writing, which Lowell had accused of soft-handedness: —

"But I must say, with regard to art and a management of my own powers, I think I shall in the main follow my own judgment and taste rather than mould myself upon those of others.

. . . Let me try to impress and please my fellowmen after my own fashion at present. When I come to your way of thinking (this may happen) I hope I shall be found worthy of a less qualified approbation than you have felt constrained to give me at this time."

One feels that Holmes was a little piqued by this reproof from a young man ten years his junior, at that time a comparative stranger to him. But any unpleasantness of feeling that there may have been soon wore away, and within two years we shall find Lowell and Holmes bound together in a lifelong friendship. This, it may be remarked here, though a little out of strict chronological sequence, was as much owing to the mellowing of Lowell as to any conviction of sin on Holmes's part. Indeed, from 1846 onward, despite Lowell's brief connection with the "Anti-Slavery Standard" and its promoters, we can trace in his friendships a significant evolution. In his letters we find from this time fewer and fewer written to his abolitionist and Quaker friends in Philadelphia and New York, and fewer references to the abolitionists in Boston, and it is clear that he was constantly becoming more intimate with the high Cambridge circle of Felton, Longfellow, and the other Olympians that then were. This change of circle progressed more rapidly after Maria White's death in 1853,

but its beginnings may be plainly seen about this time.

In March, 1847, the first sharp grief of Lowell's life came to him in the death of his daughter, Blanche. It was this deep sorrow that found expression in those utterly sincere and human poems, "She came and went," "The Changeling," and "The First Snowfall." F. H. Underwood has recorded that for many years a tiny shoe hung over a picture in Lowell's study. In September, 1847, was born the Lowells' second child, Mabel, and from their joy in her there seems to have come a slow healing of their pain.

Apart from these vital facts, the record of Lowell's life in 1847 is not specially significant. He contributed a few poems to the "Standard," a few reviews in the elaborate style of the time to the "North American Review;" he began the composition of the "Fable for Critics;" and toward the end of the year he printed the second, third, and fourth of the "Biglow Papers" in the "Boston Courier," the first letter "from Mr. Ezekiel Biglow, Jaalam, to the Honorable Joseph T. Buckingham, Editor of the Boston Courier, enclosing a poem of his son, Mr. Hosea Biglow," having appeared in the "Courier" on the 17th of June of the preceding year. But in the main the year of 1847, like that of 1846, seems to have been one of those eddies in the

stream of a poet's life from which it flows onward in deeper and swifter volume.

2. *Annus Mirabilis* (1848).

In 1848 Lowell was ten years out of college. He had gained in the law some brief experience of affairs; he had enjoyed a more varied experience in letters; he had been recognized as a poet; he had taken a right-hearted stand on the moral questions of the day, and fleshed his point in the evils; he had undergone some of the most profound emotional experiences that can come to a man; yet he had never done anything quite to justify the admiration of his friends or his own high hopes. But now, overriding "the Spence negligence," conquering for once that "dose of poppy" in his veins of which he was always complaining, and exemplifying the Lowell family motto, "Seize Your Chance," he contrived in a single year to make the whole body of his power effective in literature.

In this year he published some twoscore articles and poems in magazines and papers, and four volumes: his "Poems," second series, which was published at the beginning of the year, and the "Fable for Critics," the "Biglow Papers," and "Sir Launfal," which were published toward its end. In these volumes we have expressed nearly all sides of the many-faceted Lowell that men

remember. He appeared in them as poet, wit, critic, scholar, and reformer, and there was scarcely a line in any one of the four volumes which did not tingle with the true quality of the man.

So busy was Lowell's life in this year that his letters written during it deal with practically nothing but his writing, and in considering it now there is little else to be taken account of.

The second series of "Poems" which Lowell published just at the beginning of 1848 was largely made up of those which he had been contributing to the "Standard" and other radical papers. In these poems on the moral and political issues of the time, Lowell showed, along with a clear poetic impulse, something of the faculty of a skillful leader-writer for turning old material over and over, and thrusting at his foe from many sides. For this reason, perhaps, the majority of these pieces are not of the first poetic vitality; but in at least one poem in the volume, "The Present Crisis," written in December, 1844, he contrived to fuse those strains of poet and preacher which were sometimes at war in him into a sonorous and inspiring expression of moral passion. There seems to have been in his mind while composing it the long reverberation of "Locksley Hall," and perhaps of those billowy lines of Bernard's: —

"Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus!
Ecce, minaciter imminet arbiter, ille supremus."

But how memorably are the messages of the old singer and of the new turned against the very present crisis of the Texas controversy in such stanzas as this: —

"Careless seems the great avenger; history's pages but record
One death grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word;
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne, —
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own."

For twenty years the solemn monitory music of this poem never ceased to reëcho in public halls. In the Lowell Memorial Address which George William Curtis delivered before the Brooklyn Institute, February 22, 1892, he said in his heightened way of some passages of "The Present Crisis:" "Wendell Phillips winged with their music and tipped with their flame the darts of his fervid appeal and manly scorn. As he quoted them with suppressed emotion in his low, melodious, penetrating voice the white plume of the resistless Navarre of eloquence gained a loftier grace, that relentless sword of invective a more flashing edge." And the stanza of "The

Present Crisis," beginning, "For humanity sweeps onward," was made by Sumner the text and motif of that famous "Crime against Speech" oration that provoked the assault of Preston Brooks.

Yet even in this 1848 volume we find a sprinkling of poems which show Lowell as pure poet, whom not even the trumpet call of public service can draw away altogether from the quest of beauty. The volume concludes with "An Indian Summer Reverie," a long and loving celebration of the moods of the landscape amid which he lived, with its trees and birds and thronging memories.

The "Fable for Critics" had been begun as early as November, 1847, and several hundred lines of it had been completed almost at a single sitting. It was then laid by for a time, and taken up at intervals during nearly a year. In March, 1848, Lowell, then halfway through it, called on Longfellow and told him that he never intended to write any more poetry, at least for many years, as he found it impossible "to write slowly enough." However, he returned to the "Fable" from time to time, and it was finally published, with its well-known metrical title-page, on "October, the thirty first day," 1848. With characteristic generosity Lowell had made a present of its copyright to Briggs, and the net

gains from it were melted down into a little silver plate, which Mr. Briggs's daughter still cherishes.

It is needless here to comment on the brilliant fluency of the "Fable for Critics," to dwell on its judgments, often so shrewd and fine, or to point out its gallant service to American literature at that time when practically all criticism, save Poe's erratic fusillades, was "tuned after old dedications and tombstones." Its objective effect on Lowell's life, however, must be noted. With the first series of "Biglow Papers," soon to be issued, it helped to give him a definite position as an American humorist, both with the general reader and with the elect of letters. In Morse's life of Holmes is preserved a letter from Holmes to Lowell about the "Fable," which must have afforded the recipient of it the keenest pleasure. It is particularly interesting coming after the edifying correspondence mentioned above: —

"I think it is capital" — writes Holmes, "crammed full and rammed down hard — powder (lots of it) — shot — slugs — very little wadding, and that is guncotton — all crowded into a rusty-looking sort of a blunderbuss barrel, as it were — capped with a percussion preface — and cocked with a title page as apropos as a wink to a joke." And a little later Ruskin wrote

to Mr. Norton about the "Fable," in a letter which was doubtless communicated to Lowell: "He does me more good in my dull fits than anybody, and makes me hopeful again. What a beautiful face he has."

"The Vision of Sir Launfal," which was published soon after the "Fable," marks again with increased definition that queer duality in Lowell, — half mystic, half mocker, — which we shall have occasion so many times to note. This was never better stated than in Lowell's own clear-eyed characterization of himself written to Briggs the year before: —

"I find myself very curiously compounded of two utterly distinct characters. One half of me is clear mystic and enthusiast, and the other humorist. If I had lived as solitary as a hermit of the Thebais, I doubt not that I should have had as authentic interviews with the Evil One as they, and, without any disrespect to the saint, it would have taken very little to have made a Saint Francis of me. Indeed, during that part of my life which I lived most alone, I was never a single night unvisited by visions, and once I thought I had a personal revelation from God Himself. I can believe perfectly in the sincerity of those who are commonly called religious impostors, for, at one time, a meteor could not fall, nor lightning flash, that I did not in some way

connect it with my own interior life and destiny. On the other hand, had I mixed more with the world than I have, I should probably have become a Pantagruelist." [1]

There is probably no poem in American literature in which a visionary faculty like that suggested above is expressed with such a firm command of poetic background and variety of music as in "Sir Launfal." Holmes was doubtless correct in writing to Lowell as he did upon its publication: "To my ear it wants finish in some portions and is marred by certain incongruities;" its structure, too, is certainly — as we may see later — far from perfect; yet for all that it has stood the searching test of time; it is beloved now by thousands of young American readers, for whom it has been a first initiation to the beauty of poetic idealism.

In the "Biglow Papers," Lowell for the first time appeared in his full stature as a humorist, and for the first time expressed nearly the whole of that New England world that had gone to his making. Its shrewd common sense, its learning, its idealism, its canniness, its poetry, its prosiness, its queer blend of piety and protest, — all are here minted into something that is as unalloyed, rare, and racy of the soil as a pine-tree shilling. We have seen how, so early as 1845,

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, pp. 163, 164.

Lowell had begun to qualify for the part of Hosea Biglow. We have seen also how since his first college days he had been voyaging through those strange seas of books which enabled him to assume the rôle of Parson Wilbur so happily. For all of Lowell's multifarious journalism in those years, it could have been said of him, too, "He feels more at home with Fulke Greville, Herbert of Cherbury, Quarles, George Herbert, and Browne, than with his modern English cousins." But more than that, if we look below the delightful Peacockian prose of the old man and beneath the Yankee garb of Hosea, we shall find that the two characters dramatize the two chief sides of Lowell himself even more perfectly than they do two major strains of the New England character. Lowell never outgrew the vernacular wit and wisdom of Hosea, any more than he ever ceased to partake of that old-world lore of Parson Wilbur, which is bodied forth in such full-cadenced prose. As we shall see when we come by and by to deal more strictly with the qualities of Lowell's poetry and of his prose, he never expressed his very self more characteristically than in the rhyming of Jaalam's bard, and in the concerted paragraphs of her Dominie.

There has never been a more effective use of the weapons of literature in American politics. Indeed, Lowell was almost the first to employ the

rapier of poetic satire; for, compared with his writing in the "Biglow Papers," Freneau's poetic weapon is but a bludgeon. From the time of the appearance of what Lowell modestly styled "A sort of squib," in the Boston "Courier" for June 17, 1846, the stinging phrases of poet and parson were on everybody's lips; and as the series developed in the "Courier" and in the "Anti-Slavery Standard," its actual effect in politics was not insignificant. It did not, of course, prevent the Mexican War, nor did it ameliorate any of the abuses which followed in the train of that war; but certainly, as the professional historians agree, it did help notably in unifying public opinion at the North, and in making things exceedingly uncomfortable for the men for whom discomfort was righteous. It is said, perhaps mythically, that the Honorable John P. Robinson of Lowell, the same who said he would n't "vote fer Guvener B.," fled abroad to escape from the sound of his own name in the street; only to hear a child in an adjoining room at Liverpool chant the obnoxious refrain, and to be stung by it again on a street in Malta. However that may be, there was scarcely an editorial writer on any of the more radical papers at the North who could do his column without quoting some tag like, —

"An' you 've gut to git up airly ef you want to take in God."

In the fifty years since then, in every great moral crisis that this country has confronted, phrases and passages from the "Biglow Papers" have been sure to crop up numerously in the daily press; and more phrases from it — phrases like "There you have it, plain and flat," or "They did n't know everything down in Judee" — have passed into popular speech than perhaps from any other poem or group of poems in the history of our literature.

The popularity of the "Biglow Papers" even extended from America to England. An edition was pirated there in 1859, and an authorized edition was issued soon after by Trübner & Co., with an eloquent preface by the author of "Tom Brown's School Days." Hughes, who was not at that time acquainted with Lowell, wrote of the "Biglow Papers" with a sympathy and admiration that were perhaps more genial than critical, but with a liking which he certainly shared with some of the best judges of his time: —

"Greece had her Aristophanes; Rome her Juvenal; Spain has had her Cervantes; France her Rabelais, her Molière, her Voltaire; Germany her Jean Paul, her Heine; England her Swift, her Thackeray; and America has her Lowell. By the side of those great masters of satire, though kept somewhat in the rear by provincialism of style and subject, the author of

the 'Biglow Papers' holds his own place distinct from each and all. The man who reads the book for the first time, and is capable of understanding it, has received a new sensation. In Lowell the American mind has for the first time flowered out into thoroughly original genius."

Whatever we shall come to think of the critical comparisons in this passage, there is not much room for dissent from its concluding period. Lowell certainly had expressed the American mind, and performed for American literature the incalculable service of decreasing its specific gravity. No American reader, at least, can fail to concur with what Hughes says a little further along in his preface: —

"But for real unmistakable genius, — for that glorious fulness of power which knocks a man down at a blow for sheer admiration, and then makes him rush into the arms of the knocker-down, and swear eternal friendship with him for sheer delight, — the 'Biglow Papers' stand alone."

3. *Change.*

The impulse of Lowell's wonderful year lasted over into the following year of 1849. His contributions in prose and verse to the "Anti-Slavery Standard," of which he was now the corresponding editor, with a salary of five hundred

dollars a year, still continued. But beginning with 1849 we must notice a process of significant change in him. It was in these years that Lowell the poet and abolitionist became Professor Lowell the critic,— at first thought a rather different person.

The significant vital facts in Lowell's life from 1848 to 1850 are not very numerous. His home was visited by both joy and sorrow. A third daughter, Rose, was born the 16th of July, 1849, and died six months later, in February, 1850. His mother, who had been in an asylum for some years, died on the 30th of March, 1850. In December, 1850, was born Lowell's only son, Walter. Despite his financial cares in these years, which for all his growing reputation [1] were not inconsiderable, and despite the deeper shadow of death which was so often over the house, his life in those days of full and varied expression was a happy one. Money matters he always contrived to manage without corroding worry. As he wrote to Gay, editor of the "Anti-Slavery Standard," in February, 1849: —

"Since the day after I received your remit-

[1] A curious evidence of his increasing importance as a poet was the invitation that came to him to write an ode for the celebration of the introduction of Cochituate water into the city of Boston. On October 25, 1848, it was sung by "an immense choir of schoolchildren" ranged on the banks of Boston's far-famed Batrachian Pool.

tance for December I have literally not had a copper, except a small sum which I borrowed. It was all spent before I got it. So is all the last one, too. As long as I have money I do not think anything about it, except to fancy my present stock inexhaustible and capable of buying up the world; but when I have it not I entertain lawless and uncertain thoughts. I question those fallacious distinctions of *meum* and *tuum* which lie at the foundation of all right of property in the present social state." [1]

Lowell's inextinguishable good spirits in those days must have been largely due to his own health, which was, as always, excellent. As he writes in 1848, "I strike out three hundred strokes with a pair of twenty-four pound dumbbells every morning and evening;" and a year later he humorously complains that he has "a whoreson appearance of health and good spirits" which infects men with a false opinion of his prosperity.

In her "Homes of the New World," published in 1853, Frederika Bremer portrayed the establishment at Elmwood as she found it when she visited there in 1849. Her record is not the least pleasant and important in that series of fragmentary impressions of the Lowell home from which we have been trying to recapture some

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, p. 203.

sense of the full life that was being lived there. Miss Bremer wrote of the poet and his wife: —

"Her mind has more philosophical depth than his. Singularly enough I did not discern in him that deeply earnest spirit which charmed me in some of his poems. He seemed to me occasionally to be brilliant, witty, gay, especially in the evening, when he has what he calls his 'evening fever,' when his talk is like an incessant play of fireworks. I find him very agreeable and amiable. He seems to have many friends, mostly young men."

It is curious to see how this new friendship looked from Lowell's point of view. Writing to Briggs a few weeks later, he said with characteristic warmth: "Frederika Bremer stayed three weeks with us, and I do not *like* her, I *love* her. She is one of the most beautiful persons I have ever known — so clear, so simple, so right-minded and hearted, and so full of judgment. I believe she liked us too, and had a good time."

But slight as is the record of Lowell's external life in these two years from 1848 to 1850, the material for the study of his intellectual development is voluminous and complex, and some knowledge of this is of the first importance in obtaining a sound conception of the unity of the inner forces which swayed his life as a whole.

The course of Lowell's connection with the "National Anti-Slavery Standard" is the first thing to be considered in dealing with these significant years of change. As we have seen, he had begun to contribute to the "Standard" so early as 1846, and his name had been printed on the editorial page as one of the staff of contributors; though he did not assume a definite editorial connection with it until April, 1848. From this time his name appeared in the headline as corresponding editor until May, 1849, when it was bracketed with that of Edmund Quincy, to whom, at the request of the directorate of the "Standard," Lowell resigned half of his salary of five hundred dollars per annum. Writing to Gay at the time of this change, Lowell expresses his dissatisfaction with the conditions of his work on the "Standard," a dissatisfaction which he knew to be in some sense mutual. Though Gay, as editor-in-chief, clearly perceived the value of such a brilliant free lance as Lowell, some of the more rigid abolitionists on the managing board, like Stephen Foster, found his writing not quite to their taste. There was too much of the poet and humanist in Lowell, notwithstanding all the deep passion of his abolitionism, for him to go all the way with the abuse which some of the abolitionists liked to see heaped upon the slaveholder. As he wrote to

Gay in this letter, which is perhaps the most important document in the history of his connection with the Anti-Slavery movement: —

"You know that I never agreed to the Dissolution-of-the-Union movement, and simply because I think it a waste of strength. Why do we not separate ourselves from the African whom we wish to elevate? from the drunkard? from the ignorant? At this moment the song of the bobolink comes rippling through my open window and preaches peace. Two months ago the same missionary was in his South Carolina pulpit, and can I think that he chose another text or delivered another sermon there? Hath not a slave-holder hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter as an abolitionist is? If you prick them, do they not bleed? if you tickle them do they not laugh? if you poison them do they not die? if you wrong them shall they not avenge? Nay, I will go a step farther, and ask if all this do not apply to parsons also? Even they are human." [1]

Elsewhere in the letter Lowell complains that the position of the "Standard" was too continuously destructive for him, a poet, to be able

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, pp. 212, 213.

to throw his whole heart and soul into its work, and he offers to resign his connection with the paper altogether. Gay, however, would not hear of this, at least for the present, and so Lowell continued to contribute, though with constantly decreasing frequency, until the spring of 1852, when his name was finally dropped.

There can be no question that Lowell's connection with the "Anti-Slavery Standard" did him excellent service in chastening some of the vagaries of prose style, which had been evident in the "Conversations," and in teaching him to write with greater crispness and point. Nor can there be any question, either, that this connection was of excellent service to the abolition cause. Lowell, as we have seen, lacked something of the complete devotion of the true Garrisonian, but he brought into the movement a historic perspective which queerly combined with the half-mystic political mood of Burke something of the moral elevation of puritanism, and something of the fervor of the French political idealism of 1848. He had not, to be sure, the temperament of the born editorial writer, — he wrote in 1848, "It fags me to deal with particulars," — and he was never quite able to subject his opponents to that caustic, unrelenting attrition which, in the long run, is the best campaign of a militant editor. Sometimes his

writing was a little too quizzical; sometimes he allowed himself to slip from irony to seriousness where the ironic tone if maintained would have been more telling. His faculty of allusion, too, was often his bane. His articles too often lugged in misty old-world personages, old ballads and travelers' tales, wherewith the generality of his readers must have been shrewdly puzzled. At times, indeed, his allusions were extraordinarily keen and telling; but more often, perhaps, they were a little in the air. Yet for all their shortcomings when judged by the traditions of editorial writing, Lowell's articles in the "Standard" must have been wonderfully stirring to a certain class of readers in the North not always reached by the less mannerly assaults of other writers. His editorials were full of little satirical apologues that rarely failed to make the men at whom they were aimed appear both ludicrous and evil; and no one could read his articles and poems sympathetically from week to week without catching something of the spirit that informed them, or without deriving something of an impulse towards whatever things in politics are lovely and of good report.

Beginning with 1849, however, the reader of Lowell's political writing can see that his whole mind is less occupied with it. He is thinking more all the time of his poetic plans. He has

begun, indeed, to lose something of that boundless sense of power wherewith his poetic career had started; but he is coming to have in its place a sense of the poetic art as a definite faculty. So he began in 1849 to consider his poetic achievement up to that time and to forecast the direction of his endeavor for the future. In that year he published a two-volume collected edition of his poems, from which he omitted many of the less admirable pieces of the earlier editions; and he began to block out a large poetic undertaking, to be called "The Nooning," and to comprise a group of American narrative poems, bound together in a structure somewhat resembling that which Longfellow employed some time after in his "Tales of a Wayside Inn." With these ventures in his mind, he found the drudgery of his fortnightly contributions to the "Standard" wearing upon him more and more. He keeps writing to his friends that he is tired and longs for a year of rest in which to meditate his muse. As he writes in 1849: —

"I believe that I have done better than the world knows yet, but the past seems so little compared with the future." At last he writes to Briggs in January, 1850, that he has definitely decided to turn for a time at least from politics to poetry.

"My poems," he says, "have thus far had a

regular and natural sequence. First, Love and the mere happiness of existence beginning to be conscious of itself, then Freedom — both being the sides which beauty presented to me — and now I am going to try more *wholly* after beauty herself. Next, if I live, I shall try to present Life as I have seen it. In 'The Nooning' I shall have not even a glance toward reform. . . . Certainly I shall not grind for any Philistines, whether Reformers or Conservatives. I find that reform cannot take up the whole of me, and I am quite sure that eyes were given us to look about us with sometimes, and not to be always looking forward. If some of my red-hot friends were to see this they would call me a backslider, but there are other directions in which one may get away from people beside the rearward one. Thus I have taken an observation whereby to indicate to you my present mental and moral latitude and longitude. As well as I can judge I am farther eastward or nearer morning than ever hitherto." [1]

It is easy to assign a great variety of possible contributing causes for this decision. The circle of friends in Cambridge with whom Lowell was growing daily into a closer intimacy was not, perhaps, quite so ardent in the abolition cause as the Band had been, or his old friends of the Philadelphia, New York, and Boston abolitionist

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, pp. 252, 253.

circles. Perhaps with the cares and joys of motherhood, together with a growing delicacy of health, Maria Lowell was less able to throw the full force of her intense nature into the abolition movement, and so spur Lowell to renewed activity in that direction. Then, too, the evils that followed in the train of the Mexican War must have been a profound discouragement to all but the stanchest of the abolition cohorts. But it is not necessary to go far afield to look for external causes of this mutation of Lowell's mood. In all his political activity in these years he had been the poetical idealist rather than the budding statesman and reformer. And now that he had played his part so creditably and laboriously, and grown a little weary, it was natural for him to return to that reading of books and that writing of poetry, which had been and were to be his best-loved pursuits.

"The Nooning" was never completed. Some episodes for it, "The Voyage of Leif," the "Pictures from Appledore," and "Fitz Adam's Story," were finished and published in the magazines; but with Lowell's increasing freedom from routine engagements, he began to give himself for a time more constantly to that meditative leisure and bookish browsing which he had been craving for years. Finally in 1851 the Lowells

decided to spend a year or more in Europe. This it was thought would be of great benefit to Mrs. Lowell's health, and Lowell himself longed for the Wanderjahr that he had never had. They arranged to pay the expenses of travel by selling some of their land at the rate of ten acres a year, and in July, 1851, with their two children, Mabel and Walter, their nurse, and a goat, they sailed from Boston for the Mediterranean.

Most of the first year of their stay abroad was spent in Italy, journeying leisurely from place to place, and the winter of 1852 was spent wholly in Rome. Save for a few letters to his father and the brief Italian note-books which were afterwards published, Lowell wrote practically nothing during this time. It was a year of blind growth. Just before the Lowells arrived in Rome, word was sent them that the Reverend Charles Lowell had had a paralytic shock and had been left by it a broken man. For a time they thought of returning at once; but they finally decided to stay out their year. Again in April, 1852, a bitterer sorrow came to them in the sudden death of their only son, Walter.

Despite this heavy grief, however, Lowell's life abroad, fed as it was by deep springs, and supported by the affection of so rare a woman as Mrs. Lowell, was not altogether unhappy. Rome wove her ancient spell over his mood. His fine

sensitiveness balked at partaking in those ecclesiastical spectacles that for many are the chief charm of Rome, and he wrote: "For myself, I do not want to go and look with mere curiosity at what is sacred or solemn to others;" — nor did the vestiges of material antiquity strongly interest him; but the grandeur of the historic past of the old city by the Tiber stirred his imagination profoundly. As he wrote to John Holmes toward the end of his Roman visit, in a passage which some may think prophetic: —

"Surely the American (and I feel myself more intensely American every day) is last of all at home among ruins — but he is at home in Rome. I cannot help believing that in some respects we represent more truly the old Roman power and sentiment than any other people. Our art, our literature, are, as theirs, in some sort exotics; but our genius for politics, for law, and, above all, for colonization, our instinct for aggrandizement and for trade, are all Roman. I believe we are laying the basis of a more enduring power and prosperity, and that we shall not pass away till we have stamped ourselves upon the whole western hemisphere so deeply, so nobly, that if, in the far away future, some Gibbon shall muse among our ruins, the history of our Decline and Fall shall be more mournful and more epic than that of the huge empire amid the dust of whose

once world-shaking heart these feelings so often come upon me." [1]

In the spring of 1852, the Lowells departed sadly from Rome, and after a brief excursion through the Italian lakes, Switzerland, Germany, Provence, and France, they arrived in England in the late summer. There they spent some time in London, Oxford, and Cambridge, and saw a few of the cathedral towns, where in the English cathedrals Lowell found, as he wrote to his father, something that gave him "more absolute pleasure than anything except fine natural scenery." In England they made friends with Kenyon, and were introduced by him to Landor and other literary potentates, and were received with hearty welcome by many of the first literary men of the time. In October, 1852, they sailed for Boston, with two such congenial shipmates as Thackeray, who was going over to lecture, and Arthur Hugh Clough, who was about to seek his fortune in the new world. Despite this exceptional company, the monotony of sea-travel coming after his brisk visit in England made him dull and disinclined to converse; he notes that he was "driven to five meals a day for mental occupation."

From this time onward for a year, the shadows of a deeper sorrow than any that Lowell had yet

[1] Scudder, vol. i, pp. 342, 343.

known were darkening over Elmwood. Longfellow, calling on him soon after his return, found him sad and dispirited, and noting this in his journal, laid it to the reaction from the excitement of foreign travel. But it was only partly this. He had begun to realize that the sense of mortal insecurity which had always troubled and deepened his love for Maria White, and had been rendered more poignant by the loss of three children, was tragically well founded. Her health was growing more and more precarious daily.

Lowell made earnest efforts throughout these months to keep up his cheer in comradeship and poetic expression. R. H. Dana noted in his journal for January 5, 1853: "Supped at Lowell's with Thackeray. Present Longfellow, Felton, Clough (an Englishman), James T. Fields, Edmund Quincy. . . . Felton, Lowell, and I did nearly all the talking." And it is interesting to note that it is just at this time, when he knows he is going down into the valley of the shadow, that Lowell's characteristic humorous letter, as opposed to the witty or jocose epistles of his boyish days, first emerges in his correspondence. It was in January, 1853, that he wrote to Mrs. Francis G. Shaw of the pranks which domestic furniture was then cutting up under the manipulations of the new spirit rappers and table tippers: —

"A neighbor of ours has an exhorting boot-jack, and I expect every day to hear of the spirit of Diogenes in a washtub. Judge Wells (*Aunt* Wells, as he is affectionately called by the bar) is such a powerful *medium* that he has to drive back the furniture from following him when he goes out, as one might a pack of too affectionate dogs. I have no doubt I shall meet him some day with a footstool gambolling at his side or leaping up on his reluctant legs."

In April, May, and June of 1853, Lowell published in "Putnam's Magazine," then edited jointly by his friend Briggs and George William Curtis, the first installments of "Our Own," a poem which was never completed, and never reprinted save in fragments. It runs to several hundred lines of very spirited facetiousness and miscellaneous social and literary criticism in a series of rather Shandean digressions. In the autumn he published in the same magazine the "Moosehead Journal," which he had written home in installments to Mrs. Lowell during a brief summer outing in Maine. In December of the preceding year he had written out the first chapter of a novel, — a tale, as he afterwards described it, of the "moral life in New England." The manuscript ends with the words "Chapter Second." It is quite as well that it was never completed. Chapter first, "The Place

in Which," with its full description of the towns of Squontigook and Skunkville is too quizzical in its temper to produce any narrative illusion.

But these literary ventures, high-spirited as they seem on the surface, are to one who reads them more understandingly of a pathetic forced cheer. Lowell knew throughout the year that the happiness of his home must be shattered. In September Maria Lowell grew suddenly worse, and she died on the 27th of October, 1853.

How staggering this blow was to Lowell we can only guess. His was a nature, for all its "sloping to the southern side," peculiarly prone to seasons of black melancholy. He was too true a man to find in the easy assumptions of transcendental faith much mitigation for the first blankness and despair of human loss. Gradually, however, he recovered his hold on life. Maria had promised to be with him "if that were possible." For months after her death his old visionary faculty was constantly active. Almost nightly she revisited his dreams. In course of time this came to be to him, as it has to so many men bitterly mourning the loss of a loved woman, a sweet solace, a wonder, and a wild desire. His daughter Mabel was a singularly thoughtful and affectionate child, and his care for her helped to soften his sorrow. So, as the months went by, *natura medicatrix* performed

her healing ministrations. But Lowell never forgot or ceased to mourn. For years the very house that he had so deeply loved was dead to him : —

> "For it died that autumn morning
> When she, its soul, was borne
> To lie all dark on the hillside
> That looks over woodland and corn."

And throughout his life, as it grew in fullness and fame and came to new happinesses of home, he never ceased to keep inviolate the old memory. Rarely, it is said, did he speak of the "wife of his youth."

CHAPTER III

PROFESSOR AND EDITOR

1854–1860

1. *Dresden and Harvard.*

THE last months of 1853 and the first of 1854 were passed by Lowell in sad retirement. His father and his sister were with him, but since the paralytic stroke which Dr. Lowell had suffered in 1852, his mind had been partially broken and his mood morbidly excitable. Rebecca Lowell, too, was "queer," as the phrase is, and save for his sunny-hearted daughter there was little in the air of home to aid Lowell in his struggle back to the broad way of life. For a time his own consciousness was unwholesomely complex, and he writes in his letters of the "ugly fancy" which he used to have in those days, that on coming back from his walks he should find some other James Russell Lowell sitting in his chair, surrounded by the familiar books and belongings which he had mistakenly believed to be his own. There were, however, many influences at work to draw Lowell back to

his old hopes and occupations. His repute as a poet was constantly spreading. Briggs had just written of him that he was "a greater poet than Tennyson," and there were not wanting many to agree with this view. But more potent than this was the favor which certain prose articles in a new vein found with a large circle of readers. These were "A Moosehead Journal," published in "Putnam's Magazine" for November, 1853; "Fireside Travels," in "Putnam's Magazine" for April and May, 1854; and "Leaves from my Italian Journal," in "Graham's Magazine" for April, May, and July, 1854. The variety of these prose sketches, their abounding life and felicity of phrase, marked Lowell's second conspicuous achievement in prose; in the opinion of the present writer the letters of Parson Wilbur had been first.

It was fortunate for Lowell that he should succeed in achieving a popular success in prose just at this time when, as he wrote a little later, his Muse began to look at him "with eyes of paler flame and beckon across a gulf," when he began to experience the bitter truth that —

> "'T is not the singer's wish that makes the song."

Henceforth prose was to be his most frequent and most effective medium of expression. He continued, of course, to write numerous verse,

and there were to be times when the import of some great external occasion was to stir Lowell's poetic nature to the depths and spur him to detached poetic achievements greater and more enduring than anything he had written in his poetic period proper; but for all that, with 1854 Lowell entered upon his age of reason, — and of prose.

As the winter of 1853–54 wore on, Lowell found increasing comfort in his books; and in the records of that winter we begin to see a return of unfeigned good spirits. Mr. Moncure Conway, calling on him about this time, had an experience of his characteristic whimsicality. "I had an enthusiasm for Robert Browning," writes Mr. Conway, "but Lowell showed no interest in Browning, and shocked me by quoting the commonplaces about his obscurity. 'I own,' he said, 'a copy of "Sordello," and anybody may have it who will put his hand on his heart and say he understands it.' 'I have not read it,' I replied; 'but what is it about?' Placing his hand over his heart, he replied, 'I don't know.'"

Lowell spent the summer of 1854 with his sister-in-law, Mrs. Charles Lowell, on the Beverly shore, then a more primitive region than it is today. The keen air of that salty, pine-hung shore, and the ever-changing spectacle of the unre-

gardful sea, did much to restore Lowell's health and spirits. He did some cruising along the coast, and resumed work upon his "Pictures from Appledore," which he had begun some years previously. Bryant thought the "Pictures from Appledore" to be specimens of mere Flemish painting. But Lowell was certainly correct in maintaining that they were more than that. For despite occasional *longueurs*, no poems in the language, not excepting Mr. Swinburne's, are more impregnate with the sound and sentiment of the sea. They show how deeply Lowell, so generally reckoned a poet of the country-side rather than of the shore, had felt the glamour of the old Anglo-Saxon sea-spell.

Returning to Elmwood in the fall, much refreshed and enheartened, Lowell occupied himself in preparing for the press a selection from the poems of Maria Lowell;[1] in revising the "Pictures from Appledore," which he sent to the "Crayon," with whose young editor, W. J. Stillman, he had formed an ardent friendship; and in preparing a course of lectures upon the English poets, which he had been invited to deliver in the winter of 1854–55 before the Lowell Institute in Boston.

These lectures proved to be, even in those days when the lecture system was in its prime, a

[1] Privately printed at the Riverside Press in January, 1855.

signal triumph. The first lecture, an abstract discussion of the principles and differentiæ of prose and poetry, held the audience for fifteen minutes beyond the traditional hour, — a thing hitherto unheard of in the Institute, where one may still see the earnest audience leaking out as soon as the minute hand on the clock behind the lecturer's desk has circled the dial. Longfellow wrote in his journal after this lecture, "An admirable performance;" and Sumner wrote of another lecture in the course, "Lowell's lecture on Milton lifted me for a whole day. It was the utterance of genius in honor of genius." F. H. Underwood, afterwards Lowell's associate on the "Atlantic Monthly," gives an animated account of Lowell's delivery and its success with the audience: —

"The lectures made a deep impression upon the cultivated auditors. . . . Their success was due to their intrinsic merits. The popular lecturer is often led to imitate the vehement action of a stump orator and the drollery of a comedian by turns. Mr. Lowell's pronunciation is clear and precise and the modulations of his voice unstudied and agreeable; but he seldom, if ever, raised a hand for gesticulation, and his voice was kept in its natural compass. He read like one who had something of importance to utter, and the just emphasis was felt in the pene-

trating tone. There were no oratorical climaxes and no pitfalls set for applause. But the weighty thoughts, the earnest feeling, and the brilliant poetical images gave to every discourse an indescribable charm. The younger portion of the audience, especially, enjoyed a feast for which all the study of their lives had been a preparation."

The lectures were reported, in an abridgment from the manuscript, in the Boston "Advertiser," by Lowell's friend Carter. They lack the ripe fullness of Lowell's later writing upon Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Pope, and the rest; but they show his familiar keenness of appreciation, and they have much of the vitalizing effect upon the reader which was always the peculiar merit of his critical writing.[1]

Three weeks after the beginning of the lecture course Lowell received official notice of an event momentous in his life, — his appointment to succeed Longfellow in the Smith professorship of the French and Spanish Languages and Literatures and Belles Lettres at Harvard College,

[1] Lowell always refused to publish this series of lectures, partly because they failed wholly to satisfy him, partly because much of the material in them in a revised form was used elsewhere in his writings. Despite his wishes, however, and despite the protest of his representatives, the reports in the "Advertiser" were reprinted by a club of bibliophiles in 1897 as "Lectures on the English Poets."

with permission to spend a year in Europe for study to qualify him still further for the post. The salary attached to the chair was at that time only twelve hundred dollars; but as Lowell's private income was but six hundred, and his miscellaneous income from writing not considerable, this was a timely help. Despite some misgivings as to the effect of professional routine upon his poetical impulse, he solaced himself with the example of Gray and other poets who had held academic positions. He did not fail to be both pleased and stimulated by the honor of filling the most distinguished belletristic chair in America, which had been dignified by such occupants as Ticknor and Longfellow.

He arranged to sail for Europe in the summer of 1855. Meanwhile he spent a portion of the spring in a lecturing tour through the West, to which he had been invited after the conclusion of his lectures in Boston. This experience seems to have been not altogether inspiriting to him; though, writing to Miss Norton from Madison, Wisconsin, on April 9, 1855, he contrives to tell of it with his wonted humor: —

"Though I have been in such dreadfully low spirits since I left home that I have not seen much to write about, yet I like to keep my promises. . . . I will premise generally that I hate this business of lecturing. To be received at a

bad inn by a solemn committee, in a room with a stove that smokes, but not exhilarates, to have three cold fish-tails laid in your hand to shake, to be carried to a cold lecture-room, to read a cold lecture to a cold audience, to be carried back to your smoke-side, paid, and the three fish-tails again — well, it is not delightful exactly. On the whole, I was so desperate that after a week of it I wrote hither to be let off — but they would not, and so here I am. I shall go home with six hundred dollars in my pocket, and one of those insects so common in Italy and Egypt in my ear. Sometimes, though, one has very pleasant times, and one gets *tremendous* puffs in the local papers."

On the 29th of May, 1855, Lowell was given a rousing farewell dinner at the Revere House in Boston, at which Longfellow, Holmes, and others of that circle assisted; and the following morning, after four hours' sleep, and with keen recollections, as he noted, of "1790," he took the train for New York, and sailed on the 4th of June for Havre. After spending a few weeks in Paris and making that excursion to Chartres which he turned to poetic account fourteen years later in "The Cathedral," he crossed to London, where he spent some weeks with the Storys, and saw much of Thackeray. Here Leigh Hunt told him pleasantly that he had been unable to get

any volumes of his poems in the London Library, because they were always out. In the late summer he went to Dresden, where for a time he had the company of his sister, Mrs. Putnam, and established himself for a winter of hard study. Here he worked diligently at his German, and attended lectures in German literature and æsthetics. He even attended anatomical lectures. This afforded him a new field of simile and metaphor, which he afterward worked sometimes a little to excess. He seems to have enjoyed the various intellectual life of the German University, yet the winter in Dresden was not altogether a happy one, although, as usual, he contrives to write of it with inextinguishable gayety: —

. . . "I am beim Herrn Hofrath Dr. Reichenbach, who is one of the kindest of men, and Madame is a 'first-rate fullah' too, as my nephew Willie would say. I have a large room *am Parterre*, with a glass door opening upon a pretty garden. My walls are hung with very nice pictures painted by the *gnädige Frau* herself; and they were so thoughtful as to send down before I came a large case with American birds very well stuffed and mounted, so that I might have some friends. Some of them are very familiar, and I look at the oriole sometimes till I hear him whistling over the buttercups in the dear

old times at Elmwood. Ah, how deep out of the past his song comes! But *hin ist hin, verloren ist verloren!* Then I have one of those solemn ceremonials, a German bed — with a feather-bed under which I engrave myself at night and dream that I am awaiting the last trump. Then I have the prettiest writing-table, bought *exprès pour moi* by Madame, *weil ich ein Dichter bin*, — and at which I am now sitting, — with drawers for everything and nothing. I rack my brains for what to put in 'em. I am fast turning into a 'regular' German, according to the definition of that Italian innkeeper at Amalfi, who told me, speaking of a man that was drowned, '*bisognerebbe che fosse un Tedesco perchè sempre stava a casa, e non faceva niente che fumare e studiare.*' I get up *um sieben Uhr* and *das Mädchen* brings me my coffee and *Butterbrod* at 8. Then I begin to study. I am reading for my own amusement (*du lieber Gott!*) the *aesthetische Forschungen von* Adolph Zeising, pp. 568, large octavo! Then I overset something *aus* German into English. Then comes dinner at 1 o'clock with *ungeheuer* German dishes. *Nachmittag* I study Spanish with a nice young Spaniard who is in the house, to whom I teach English in return. *Um sechs Uhr gehe ich spazieren*, and at 7 come home and Dr. R. dictates and I write. *Aber potztausend*

Donnerwetter! what a language it is to be sure! with nominatives sending out as many roots as that witch-grass which is the pest of all child-gardens, and sentences in which one sets sail like an admiral with sealed orders, not knowing where the devil he is going to till he is in mid-ocean! Then, after tea, we sit and talk German — or what some of us take to be such — and which I speak already like a native — of some other country. But Madame R. is very kind, and takes great pains to set me right. The confounded genders! If I die I will have engraved on my tombstone that I died of *der*, *die*, *das*, not because I caught 'em, but because I could n't. Dr. R. is one of the most distinguished *Naturwissenschaftsgelehrten* (! !) in Europe — a charming, friendly, simple-hearted man. I attend his Vorlesungen, und *etwas* verstehe." . . .[1]

In the spring of 1856 Lowell went to Italy for a brief rest from his hard study. There he was met by the Nortons, the Storys, John Field, Page, and others, and was lured into extending his visit into a stay of several months. He made the circuit of Sicily in company with Mr. Norton, John Field, and C. C. Black, chiefly on mule-back. From the manuscript journal of the tour, written jointly by the members of the party, it would appear that Lowell was more impressed

[1] *Letters*, vol. i, pp. 317–319.

by the humors of travel, by the Sicilian temperament as he found it, than by the historic and literary sentiment of the places he visited. Even on the curved Trinacrian shore, where the bowery hollows sloping to the Sicilian sea, the white sky-filling mass of Etna, and the flocks still shepherded to the bubbling music of the pipe, revive so vividly the old Arcadian world of Theocritus, he seems not to have fallen very deeply under the spell. Yet how vivacious is this account of his adventures in Catania, taken from the unpublished Journal, from a passage in Lowell's hand.

CATANIA

"It may safely be presumed that one need not wait longer for the charm of a city than for vaccination to take, — 'he never loved that loved not at first sight,' — and as I am writing this journal at a week's distance from Catania, I am tolerably safe in saying that it is an uninteresting town. I examine my mind as a child does his vaccinated arm, but no trace of Catania do I find there. All that I can remember is the hotel, the hotel-book in which some Englishman had written — 'Mr. & the Misses Brown clean and comfortable' — and the waiter Don Placido, who smiled so eternally that you wished he would just once kick you — who indeed seemed to smile

all over, and whose very boots creaked *Commandi Signoria.* Indeed what special interest could a city be supposed to have, which owes its fame to its having been destroyed by an earthquake? The destroyed city, of course, we did not see, and the present one was to supply us with money and a carriage to Nicolosi merely. A discussion on the budget was first had, and it was resolved that the Hospodar [1] (as most likely to make a favorable impression on the commercial world of Catania) should go out and get some on his letter of credit. Campo [2] went with him to prevent his making any financial blunders, and he went with Campo to see that no money was squandered on lava puddingstones or amber bottles small enough for the lachrymatory of a miser's heir, utterly useless for that or any other purpose. (Statistical memorandum — These and silks and fleas are the chief industry of Catania.) We went first to the British Consul (the bird of our country being out of town — or said to be) to ask about a banker. He was very civil, and directed us to a Signor Stucco — or some such name — the Austrian vice-consul and the principal banker of Catania. We found our way thither and were received with a politeness which made us both feel quite easy, and Campo was in fancy buying half the lava of

[1] Lowell. [2] Field.

Etna, while the Hospodar in fluent Italian skirmished gracefully over the confines which divide conversation from business, and at last drawing out his letter, made known the object of his embassy. The Sicilian started as if he did not know the difference between the epistle and a pistol, but at last took the proffered document and retired with it into the dimmer recesses of his web like a spider who, feeling his trap sprung, flashes out, and then, finding that he has caught not a fly but a bumble-bee, flashes as suddenly back again. Meanwhile the unsuspicious Hospodar and Campo took counsel together how much they should draw for. Hopes as transient as the raindrops which the bird shakes from a twig in lighting! The Sicilian was wise in his generation and had heard of repudiation. He came out with a less beaming countenance, and said that it *rincresced* him and all that, but that he did not know who '*Beareeng Frères*' were. In vain we expostulated and stated as gently as possible the corollary that not to know them argued himself unknown. He combined the corporeal courtesy of a Chinese Mandarin with the mental rigidity of an English poker. He seemed to fear his name would take cold by standing in any of our drafts. If the British Consul would guarantee our draft he would be enchanted to cash it. 'Hang him for a stupid Sicilian!' growled

Campo, but unfortunately this operation, however grateful to our feelings, would have been pecuniarily profitable only to the hemp-growers of Sicily. Quite dejected, and feeling a very decided tail-between-the-legsiness as if we had been detected in an unsuccessful attempt at swindling, we came back to the Hotel. How little did Don Placido think as he went off into smiles as mechanically as a musical box into the last waltz, that he was doing it all for a party of beggars who, so far from getting up Mt. Etna, could not have got up eight carlini among them! We held a treasury-meeting — we laughed — we fancied ourselves having an experience of Don Rafael or Lazarillo di Tormes — we looked at our watches for the first time not to see what o'clock it was, but how much we could pledge them for. Then it was decided that leaving Campo in pawn at the Corona, and taking the letter of Don Carlos[1] as being for a larger sum and more impressive, the other three should make another effort. We resolved to try the effect of Nero[2] as a British subject upon the Consul, and he accordingly coldcreamed his nose and put on his black hat to be as imposing as possible. On the way, we thought we would try the American Consulate. We found an enormous eagle over the door and a dirty Sicilian inside it — short, thick and brown

[1] Mr. Norton. [2] Mr. Black.

like a trabuco cigar — greasy like a sausage — a seedy half-battered dignitary who evidently thought Sicilian water not good enough to wash an American functionary in. All that he could do for us was to tell us that we had better go to a banker named Jacobi, who was a foreigner and would know something — the other, he said, with an ineffable shrug, was a Sicilian. Here was a patriot indeed! He showed us in going out some photographs given him by Mr. G. P. Marsh our late Minister at Constantinople, and then showed us the door — an interesting object at all times. We went back to the British Consul who, if our hereditary foe, was still clean, and he gave us a note to Signor Stucco, and lent us a boy for guide. Mr. Plaster was as civil as ever — gave us the last journal, which was only three weeks' old, retired again with the letter, and reappeared to say that if the Consul would guarantee us he would let us have money. The youth who had guided us was dispatched, and came back in about half an hour with another note in which the Consul had declared himself willing to become security to the amount of ten or fifteen pounds. By this delicate scale the Hospodar, Don Carlos and Nero were able to weigh the united amount of respectability in their faces. In the opinion of some thoughtful persons the Consul wrote at first ten — and then, thinking

of the Hospodar added 'or fifteen.' We took ten, and returned to raise the spirits of Campo, who had begun to fancy that we had decamped and was wondering if the sheets would reach from the balcony to the ground."

In the early summer Lowell returned to Dresden, and a few weeks later he sailed westward. In August, 1856, he was home again in Cambridge, established with his daughter, Mabel, and her governess, Miss Frances Dunlap, in the house of his brother-in-law, Dr. Estes Howe, on Kirkland Street, then known as Professors' Row. This was to be his home until January, 1861, for during those four years the health of Dr. Lowell and of Miss Rebecca Lowell was such that Elmwood could scarcely have been a suitable and happy abode for a little girl.

Miss Frances Dunlap was a sister of Miss Elizabeth Dunlap, an intimate friend of Maria Lowell. The Dunlaps were a fine old family of Portland, Maine, which had experienced a misfortune by which the daughters had been thrown on their own resources for their support. Before Mrs. Lowell's death she had wished that Mabel might be placed in the care of her friend Elizabeth Dunlap; but Miss Dunlap died soon after Mrs. Lowell, and her sister succeeded to the charge. Miss Frances Dunlap was a young

woman of able and alert intelligence and a sympathetic, womanly nature — one of those persons, it is said, who spread about them a feeling of warm comfort and happy quietude, and blessed with much of that sweet serenity that seems to be the heritage of those who embrace the Swedenborgian faith. She was, too, a beautiful woman, thought by her friends to be the living presentment of the familiar bust of Clytie. Lowell's friendship for her had ripened fast, and before he went to Europe in 1855 he recognized in himself a definite inclination toward her; but wishing to test himself by a year of absence, they had parted simply as friends. Upon his return from Europe, however, he found this inclination but the stronger, and he came more and more to depend upon her for comfort and cheer. When he had been home a few months, an engagement was contracted, and they were married in September, 1857. Through this union the happiness of Lowell's life was reintegrated. Though he did not find in his second marriage quite the exaltation of poetic impulse that he had known with Maria White, the influence of the second Mrs. Lowell in his life was mellowing and sustaining. She had, it is said, both domestic efficiency and a native critical talent of a high order. As time went on, Lowell came to trust more and more to her judgment of his work, and to find in the

soothing of her presence an effective safeguard against the overwrought moods to which he had formerly been subject. For the quarter of a century that Mrs. Lowell lived after the marriage, their life together was one of entire happiness, although they had no children.

Lowell began his ministrations to the Harvard youth in September, 1856, and continued to deliver his lectures and meet his classes without interruption for sixteen years. Of his work as professor, many accounts, not altogether consistent, have been handed down; but by collating them we may gain a pretty just impression of the manner of it. Coming as he did to the chair at the age of thirty-seven, after fifteen years of a free literary life, he was wholly devoid of academic mannerisms and conventions; and all the witnesses agree as to the freshness, the individuality and charm of his teaching, — at least in the earlier years of it. As time went on, and the ageless stream of boys flowed through his classroom, he grew a little weary and a little detached, so that when Mr. Barrett Wendell joined his class in Dante in 1876 his first impression of Lowell was that he had never met any one else so quizzical. Another who about the same time attended Lowell's viva voce translation of "Don Quixote" was chiefly and particularly impressed by the way he "got after the commen-

tators." But from the first Lowell was a more serious teacher than would appear from these records; the more studious sort of boy, provided he were willing to surrender himself to Lowell's influence, never failed to get from him an admirable love of great literature, and an equally admirable hatred of cant and buncombe in literary matters.

At first Lowell's work consisted in giving a course in Dante, a course in German literature, and in delivering at stated intervals public lectures before the college upon English poetry and general letters. As time went on, he dropped the course in German, and substituted for it another in Spanish literature, which was chiefly given up to the translation and exposition of "Don Quixote;" some years later he had a course in old French literature, which was to be for the last twenty years of his life the field of his most exact scholarship.

Of these courses, that in Dante was his own favorite, and the one which proved most stimulating to his students. His classes were never very large, and this made it easy for him to come into more intimate relations with his boys than would otherwise have been possible. Perhaps the most minute and vivid record we have of Lowell's Dante class is that by George E. Pond in the "Liber Scriptorum," published by the

Authors' Club of New York, in 1893. This shows Lowell in 1859 and 1860, when his teaching was at its freshest and best, habitually meeting his class in his study on Kirkland Street. It shows his teaching in those days to have been remarkable for its readiness, variety, and vividness of illustration, for the unfailing politeness and geniality of his relations with his class, and for a deep concern about the spiritual import of the "Divine Comedy." In later years he sometimes failed to apply himself very directly to the individuality of his students; but in the early days every man in his class seems to have felt that Lowell was a personal friend. Sometimes he even read new-born poems to his boys. But while Lowell's teaching, like that of all great teaching humanists from Socrates and Erasmus down, had a discursiveness, a whimsicality, and a personality that is not common in the typical pedagogue, he never lost sight of the end of his teaching. As he said in a fragmentary lecture on the study of literature, published in the "Harvard Crimson" three years after his death: —

"I believe that the study of imaginative literature tends to sanity of mind, and to keep the Caliban of common sense, a very useful monster in his proper place, from making himself king over us. It is a study of order, proportion, arrangement, of the highest and purest Reason. It

teaches that chance has less to do with success than forethought, will, and work."

For all the seeming fortuity of much of Lowell's teaching, it was, all things considered, markedly successful, and the spring of its success was "forethought, will, and work."

From the first days of his academic career, Lowell gave himself to arduous and persistent study, often working all night and only going to bed for a brief sleep with the earliest pipe of the birds. Up to 1856, he had been an intermittent, omnivorous reader and curious interpreter of old books. He now began to attain to a little more consistent and elaborate scholarship.

Lowell, it is needless to say at this hour, was never quite a scholar in the German sense of the word, nor even in the modern American academic sense: but he was a scholar in what we may perhaps think a more admirable sense, — that in which the bookmen of the Renaissance were so. Like Dryden, he "never read anything except for pleasure," but save for certain types of modern fiction, there was little that he could not, and did not, read with delight. He had the old-time scholar's deep imaginative perception of the unity and coherence of this various old world. Nothing human was alien from him, nothing outworn; he sought the ineffaceable vestiges of humanity as keenly, almost, in his old French

texts or New England sermons as in the "Divine Comedy" or "Don Quixote."

Through his spectacles of books, Lowell saw life steadily, and saw it whole; and it is here that his learning comes most directly into opposition to modern specialized scholarship. He had his dislikes in literature, no man more; but few men have ever viewed the literature of Europe in all its periods more wisely, genially, and comprehensively. In his more elaborate essays upon the great English and Continental writers, his swift intuition — grounded, as it was, upon wide reading and ripe meditation — led him to many novel generalizations upon the interaction of national literatures, or the organic relation of literary periods, one to another, that have since become the commonplaces of comparative scholarship. Of the jealousies and contempts of the modern specialists — the Mediævalist for the Renaissance man, and the Renaissance man for the student of more modern literature — he had nothing; and when in his last years these began to emerge in American scholarship, no man handled them more caustically than Lowell.

But for all his range and discursiveness, Lowell made himself a more minute and punctilious scholar than has always been recognized. Of that unprofitable type of scholarship brought into fashion by young Germans, interpreting

poetry by the aid of a table of Logarithms in lieu of a Poetics, or tracking an "Einfluss" that perhaps in nine cases out of ten has no more substantial existence than an Irish snake, Lowell was impatient; yet there were few doctoral theses published within his field that he did not at least glance through, to see if perchance anything of significance had strayed or been conveyed into them.

It was as a philologist and student of linguistics that Lowell came nearest to technical scholarship. He was never at much pains to consider scientifically the operation of what are called "sound laws," and he was never quite abreast of the authoritative philological scholarship of his day. For this reason it is not difficult, in the light of more recent information, to find mistakes in his comments on the derivation and history of words. But the happy hits and shrewd observations are far more frequent than the errors. He had an extraordinary verbal memory, and the cling of a picturesque word or phrase to his imagination was very tenacious. It is this keen tasting of the flavor of words and this unusually ample knowledge of their actual use in the literatures of half a dozen countries, added to the poet's sense of word values, that give a special interest to Lowell's linguistic remarks in such papers as that upon the "Library of Old Authors" or his

introduction to the second series of the "Biglow Papers."

In the course of the latter part of his life Lowell collected a library of some seven hundred volumes dealing with old French literature — no inconsiderable aggregate. These were left by his will to the library of Harvard University, and are now kept there as a special collection. One who would know the real character of Lowell's scholarship has but to turn the pages of these volumes and peruse the notes upon their fly-leaves. Verbal references and queries of derivation are frequent; but the more common type of note — written usually in French when the text is French, sometimes in Latin when the text is Latin — deals with some quaint human touch which else might be lost in a great Sahara of repetitious narrative. He habitually annotated those passages of wistful pathos or lively humor which help to make misty old days live again in a scholar's imagination. In 1889, two years before his death, he said of his study of Old French, "I cannot see exactly what good it has done me or anybody else." This, however, was but a passing cynicism, for he knew perfectly well, as we know now, that it had contributed to give his historical imagination both breadth and solidity of fundament.

In short, Lowell admirably fulfilled the ideal

of the scholar set forth in a lecture upon "The First Need of American Culture," part of which was printed in the "Harvard Crimson" for May 4, 1894: "True scholarship consists in knowing not what things exist, but what they mean; it is not memory but judgment. It is the foundation of true criticism. And the advantage of a proper cultivation of the critical faculty is that it helps us to composure, to self-possession, those things above all others desirable."

But Lowell was a reader and a bookman as well as a scholar; and the topic of Lowell as a bookman is worth a moment's discussion here, for it was in these four years spent in the back den in the house on Professors' Row, and in the sixteen years following, in which he was at home among his books at Elmwood, that Lowell did most of that infinite reading that made him, as he said, "one of the last great readers" of the world, and gave so buxom a charm to the series of bookish essays which appeared during these years. His letters from 1857 onward are full of references to this constant, voluminous reading, among which allusions to his perusal of queer, out-of-the-way books are no less frequent than his incidental mention of his reading of long sets of the works of great writers. "Among books, certainly," he said, "there is much variety of company, ranging from the best to the worst — from

Plato to Zola," and he habitually sought the best, though at times he was not at all averse to the company of the worst. In one letter he observes casually, "I read Euripides through last winter and took a great fancy to him." It is worth setting down with this that in the very last year of his life he read Terence through. This reading of authors "through" was always a habit of his. Mention of his particular joy in Calderon is constantly recurring. In a letter written to Miss Norton in 1874 we find an account of a characteristic segment of his reading: —

"I have been at work, and really hard at work, in making books that I had read and marked really useful by indexes of all peculiar words and locutions. I have finished in this way since I came home, Golding's 'Ovid,' Warner's 'Albion's England,' Laing's and the Thornton 'Metrical Romances,' the 'Chevalier au Lion;' and yesterday in eight unbroken hours I did Barbour's 'Brus.' Then I have been reading many volumes of the Early English Text Society's series in the same thorough way. A professor, you know, must be learned, if he cannot be anything else, and I have now reached the point where I feel sure enough of myself in Old French and Old English to make my corrections with a pen instead of a pencil as I go along. Ten hours a day, on an average, I have been at

it for the last two months, and get so absorbed that I turn grudgingly to anything else. My only other reading has been Mr. Sibley's book of 'Harvard Graduates,' which is as unillumined, dry, and simple, as the 14th century prose of the Early English Texts. But it interests me and makes me laugh. It is the prettiest rescue of prey from Oblivion I ever saw. The gallant librarian, like a knight-errant, slays this giant, who carries us all captive sooner or later, and then delivers his prisoners. There are ninety-seven of them by tale, and as he fishes them out of those dismal oubliettes they come up dripping with the ooze of Lethe like Curll from his dive in the Thames, like him also gallant competitors for the crown of Dulness. It is the very balm of authorship. No matter how far you may be gone under, if you are a graduate of Harvard College you are sure of being dredged up again and handsomely buried, with a catalogue of your works to keep you down."[1]

The kind of work reported above, spasmodic as it may sometimes have been, goes to show that Lowell had, for the time, pretty well won the upper hand of "the Spence negligence." For a man of Lowell's temperament as much energy of will, as much overcoming of organic inhibitions, was needed to attempt and carry

[1] *Letters*, vol. ii, pp. 343, 344.

through that piece of work on Barbour's "Brus" as would have taken a city.

If there was one thing that Lowell loved anywhere near so well as reading books, it was talking about them. All the most vivid pictures that we have of him in his library mention this trait. When Leslie Stephen called on him in the war times he found at first sight "a singularly complete specimen of the literary recluse," and he goes on to say of Lowell in his library: "The great lights of literature were there too, of course, and would suggest occasional flashes of the playful or penetrative criticism which is so charming in his writings, and which was yet more charming as it came quick from the brain." And Mr. Howells has witnessed to the same thing: "When he quoted anything from a book, he liked to get it and read the passage over, as if he tasted a kind of hoarded sweetness in the words."

So for the twenty years from 1857 onward, despite Lowell's engagements with his classes at Harvard and despite those editorial avocations of which we shall presently have to speak, his real vocation was with the five thousand volumes that made up his library. Both winter and summer he sat among them, comfortably provided with pipe and velvet jacket, reading, reading, — now going to the shelves to turn the pages

of some brown yellow-leaved volume, with that "practised finger" that to the books "seemed like a brain;" now laying aside the open volume face down for some minutes or hours of discursive talk with an acceptable caller. If, as Arnold said, "A man's life of each day depends for its solidity and value on whether he read during *that* day, and far more still, on what he reads during it," how full and rich must have been Lowell's life in those years. That it was so we can discover from his letters, for those that were written during this period are the happiest and most characteristic of his life.

It is perhaps in this rôle of the bookman among his books that the true lover of Lowell likes best to think of him — sitting among the books and birds of Elmwood, in such a mood as that which he has expressed in "Fancy's Casuistry," evoked by the sound of the Cambridge firebells: —

"But on my far-off solitude
No harsh alarums can intrude;
The terror comes to me subdued
And charmed by distance,
To deepen the habitual mood
Of my existence.

"Are those, I muse, the Easter chimes?
And listen, weaving careless rhymes
While the loud city's griefs and crimes
Pay gentle allegiance

To the fine quiet that sublimes
These dreamy regions."

But though this was his most habitual and his deepest mood, Lowell could never have been what he seemed at first to Stephen, the "singularly complete specimen of the literary recluse." He was often in the open, walking to his favorite Beaver Brook at Waverley, or to the Waverley Oaks, whose wide-spreading, gnarled branches give to the glade which they surround a singular effect of artistically disposed nature, and whose Corot-like sentiment was a frequent symbol in his poetry.

In winter time he found congenial relaxation in the meetings of a famous Whist Club, composed of Lowell, Carter, John Holmes, and Dr. Estes Howe, an organization seemingly more notable for its concert of wit, than for silent devotion to the cards. Beginning with the summer of 1857, he took each year a brief vacation trip to the Adirondacks, in company with the celebrated "Adirondack Club," of which Mr. Stillman was the excellent historian in many magazine sketches, and which was immortalized in Emerson's poem. Here Lowell entered with zest into the free life of the woods. He was not a very persistent fisherman; and this one might expect as corresponding with those defects in

quietude and simplicity which occasionally appear in his poetry and prose. But he was, as all the reporters agree, a good swimmer and an excellent rifle shot — though he characteristically proposed to require the members of the Adirondack Club to shoot deer with the bow and arrow.

2. *The Atlantic Monthly.*

So early as 1853, Mr. F. H. Underwood, the "literary adviser," as the quaint phrase is, of the firm of Jewett and Company, publishers, of Boston, had conceived the idea of establishing a new literary magazine which should at once play its part in the reform movements, which then held the stage, and carry the best of the literature that was then making in New England. He even went so far as to solicit Lowell's aid in the enterprise, but for four years nothing came of it. When, however, Underwood in 1857 transferred his allegiance to Phillips, Sampson and Company, he took up the enterprise anew, with the active coöperation of Mrs. Stowe, whose books had been taken over from Jewett and Company by his new employers. Soon he had his project fairly launched. On the 5th of May, 1857, Mr. Phillips gave the famous dinner at the Parker House at which "The Atlantic Monthly" came into being. Those present, beside Mr. Phillips and Mr. Underwood, were Emerson, Holmes,

Cabot, Motley, Longfellow, and Lowell. The plan broached at this time found hearty favor with all. Messrs. Phillips and Sampson undertook the publication of the magazine, which, at the happy suggestion of Dr. Holmes, was christened "The Atlantic Monthly." Lowell was appointed editor, and Underwood was to fill a position on it combining the functions of business manager and assistant editor. After some months of preparation, the first number of the "Atlantic" appeared in November, 1857, in a format and dress of type not unlike that which it wears to-day.

From the first Lowell made an admirable editor. Despite the arduousness of combining the two professions of professor and editor, he contrived to give his freshest hours to the "Atlantic," and to impress upon it a stamp of his many-sided personality which it has never wholly lost. Before accepting the editorship, he had stipulated that Dr. Holmes should be engaged as a regular contributor. As "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" began to appear in the first number, to be followed by "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," the magazine was marked from the outset by that engaging urbanity of which Holmes was so complete a master. Although the continuous contributions of Holmes did more, perhaps, than anything else to give

the "Atlantic" its individual quality and charm, there was nothing in any of the early numbers that was not in harmonious concert. For all of Lowell's bookishness, whimsicality, and poetry, he had a shrewd editorial faculty, which, as we have seen, had already proved its effectiveness in the three numbers of the "Pioneer." He had a clear, practical sense of the qualities which alone could make the "Atlantic" successful, and he founded a tradition for the magazine which all of its succeeding editors have endeavored in some measure to live up to. He was fortunate, of course, in having a clientele of writers already intimately associated with himself, who could write with all the telling scholarship of those similar groups that made "Blackwood's" and some other English reviews so remarkable, — men who could write without falling a prey to that laborious solemnity which has so often dogged the pens of even the ablest Americans when they turn themselves to magazine composition. Lowell's "Atlantic" — with its contributions from Dr. Holmes, Emerson, Whittier, Longfellow, Clough, Thoreau, Mrs. Stowe, Colonel Higginson, Mr. Norton, Mr. Trowbridge, Mr. Aldrich, Mr. Howells, the editor himself, and a score of less known men in England and America — was always readable, yet never superficial; gay, but not flippant; edi-

fying, but not dull. As time went on and the shadows of the Civil War darkened over the country, the prevailing tone of the "Atlantic" grew more earnest and weighty, but it never lost its readableness and literary charm.

The effects of his editorial labors in Lowell's life were various. His salary at first was twenty-five hundred dollars a year, — with an additional stipend of six dollars a page for his own contributions, — and later this was increased to three thousand dollars. This, in addition to his modest salary as professor at Harvard, and his own slight means, gave him a freedom from financial narrowness that he had never before enjoyed, and made it possible for him to add more rapidly and consistently to his library, and to live a broader life in many ways.

On the whole, too, — at least at first, — he took the thousand worries and pitfalls of an editor's life with a certain detachment and high spirits that kept them from fretting him. The volume of his work was very considerable. Some five hundred manuscripts were sent to the "Atlantic" every month, and the typewriter was still unknown. Though Lowell had some assistance in the reading from Mr. Underwood, and later from Mr. Howard Ticknor, and was also helped by these gentlemen in the necessary voluminous correspondence with authors, he seems

not to have been content without reading and rereading a large portion of all this "pen-and-inkubus" himself. He revised all the copy for each number, often very minutely and subtilely,[1] and read every line of the proof. He seems in some other respects not to have been a very punctilious and systematic editor; occasionally, even, he lost manuscript, — from the point of view of the contributor a heinous offense; sometimes, too, he was remiss in promptitude of correspondence. But remembering the volume of work which confronted him, and remembering that he had no aid from what is called in Lowellese a "womanuensis," he did marvelously well. As time went on, however, he grew weary of the unrelenting pressure of his editorial work, as well as of the necessity for conciliation and

[1] From Thoreau's "Chesuncook," which ran through three numbers of the magazine in 1858, Lowell struck out this sentence, referring to a pine-tree, "It is as immortal as I am, and perchance will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still." Thoreau considered this beyond the bounds of the editorial prerogative, and refused to let Lowell have "The Allegash and the East Branch," which was to have followed "Chesuncook" in the *Atlantic*. This seems to have caused the publishers some annoyance. Lowell's action was doubtless influenced by his desire to anger no further the orthodox religionists, who had already been much disturbed by some passages in the *Autocrat*. Moreover, while the sentence contained a doctrine that Lowell as a poet often gave expression to, it was precisely the kind of thing over which his own poetic and critical faculties were constantly at war.

compromise with his publishers. No conscientious editor can escape a constant sense of a fourfold responsibility, — to his readers, to his writers, to his owners, and to himself. In practice the resolution of the four may not be easy, and Lowell seems to have had his share of such trouble. He wrote to Mr. Norton in 1858: —

"I am resolved that no motives of my own comfort or advantage shall influence me, but I hate the turmoil of such affairs, despise the notoriety they give me, and long for the day when I can be vacant to the muses and to my books for their own sakes."

With the exception of some notable poems, — "The Origin of Didactic Poetry," "The Dead House," "Italy, 1859," and "L'Envoi: To the Muse," — and some important political articles to be considered in the next chapter, Lowell's own contributions to the "Atlantic" consisted chiefly of numerous and careful notices of contemporary books. He had, as might be expected, a rigorous ideal of the criticism of contemporary literature. The forty-odd review articles which he printed in the "Atlantic" during the period of his editorship show flashes of his inextinguishable wit and passages of his characteristic savory prose; but in the main they are specimens of that painstaking, fully informed, cutting criti-

cism of which the reviews in the London "Athenæum" were for long the finest type.

Bound as he was by professorial and editorial assiduities, Lowell's life in the years from 1857 to 1860 was lived largely in his study. Each morning he walked from his house on Kirkland Street to the river, and down a winding, picturesque path to the Riverside Press, to read his proof and mail. Then he would return to his den, where he was likely to sit among his books and manuscripts till far into the night, save when he must needs go to the college across the street to lecture or to hear a handful of youths recite their allotment of Dante or Cervantes. Thence he would soon be back again in his study to light his pipe, "thank God that he had done a day's work," and so to reading again.

His chief social pleasure and relaxation in these years was at the monthly dinners of the famous Saturday Club, which had been initiated some years before by the meetings of one or two friends with Emerson at an early dinner at the Albion on Saturday, the day on which it was his habit to come to Boston. By 1859 this little group of choice minds had taken definite form as a dining club. Here Lowell could meet with Holmes, Longfellow, Emerson, Agassiz, Hawthorne, and others of less eminence, in the smoky atmosphere that Thoreau on the occasion of his

single visit found so intolerable, for a monthly exercitation in wise and witty converse. In his noble ode on the death of Agassiz, Lowell has described these jocund meetings, —

"When Saturday her monthly banquet spread
To scholars, poets, wits,
All choice, some famous, loving things, not names,
And so without a twinge at others' fames;
Such company as wisest moods befits,
Yet with no pedant blindness to the worth
Of undeliberate mirth,
Natures benignly mixed of air and earth,
Now with the stars, and now with equal zest
Tracing the eccentric orbit of a jest."

In this congenial circle, Lowell, by reason of his various powers, his readiness, and his position as the editor of the magazine which mostly carried the writings of the Club, was a chief and principal figure. The Club admired and loved him, and he, it is said, cared more for what the Club might think of any piece of his writing than for any other criticism or popularity.

On his fortieth birthday, February 22, 1859, the Saturday Club held a special celebration. Among the tributes in prose and verse that were read upon that occasion was a poem by Emerson which has never been seen in print. It is of peculiar dramatic interest in its foreshadowing of the part that Lowell was to play during that great war of which the distant thunder was al-

ready heard. In this poem the Sibyl called on to tell Lowell's fortune answers, "Strength for the hour!" Then follow these verses: —

"Man of marrow, man of mark,
Virtue lodged in sinew stark,
Rich supplies, and never stinted,
More behind as need is hinted:
Never cumbered with the morrow,
Never knew corroding sorrow;
Too well gifted to have found
Yet his opulence's bound;
Most at home in mounting fun,
Broadest joke and luckiest pun,
Masking in the mantling tones
Of a rich laughter-loving voice,
In speeding troops of social joys,
And in volleys of wild mirth,
Purer metal, rarest worth,
Logic, passion, cordial zeal,
Such as bard and martyr feel.
. . . . . .
But, if another temper come,
If on the sun shall creep a gloom,
A time and tide more exigent,
When the old mounds are torn and rent,
More proud, more stormy competitors
Marshal the list for emperors, —
Then the pleasant bard will know
To put the frolic masque behind him
Like an old familiar cloak,
And in sky-born mail to bind him,
And single-handed cope with Time,
And parry and deal the Thunder-stroke."

Up to 1860 Lowell had not quite put his frolic masque behind him, though we can trace in his mood a growing seriousness and gravity. In 1860 Mr. Howells came to see him with a worn letter accepting a poem for the "Atlantic" in a pocket over his heart. He found him "a bit of a disciplinarian," and goes on to say: —

"At the first encounter with people he always was apt to have a certain frosty shyness, a smiling cold, as from the long high-sunned winters of his Puritan race; he was not quite himself until he had made you aware of his quality; then no one could be sweeter, tenderer, warmer, than he. Then he made you free of his whole heart; but you must be his captive before he could do that."

In January, 1861, the Reverend Charles Lowell died, and Lowell moved back again to Elmwood. As he writes to Briggs in March, 1861: "You will see by my date that I am back again in the place I love best. I am sitting in my old garret, at my old desk, smoking my old pipe, and loving my old friends. I begin already to feel more like my old self than I have these ten years." So it was at Elmwood, with its memories of his early poetic days, and of happy fighting in the abolition cause, that Lowell played that great part in the time of his country's travail which must be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

PUBLIC MAN AND CRITIC

1861–1876

1. *Lowell and the War of the Rebellion.*

WRITING to Thomas Hughes in September, 1859, Lowell speaks, not without a certain complacency, of twelve years of cloistered studies that have alienated him very much from contemporary politics. The alienation, however, was more fanciful than real; with all his business of teaching and editing, with all his long wandering in bookish realms of gold, with all his jocund hours of friendly fellowship, he had never ceased to brood over the issues of national righteousness. If, for a time, the poet-militant in him seemed to slumber, deep was the passion of that sleep, and when he awakened to the drums and trampling of civil war it was to chant his noblest measures.

His growth in these years of "cloistered studies" exemplified precisely the course foreshadowed in that "L'Envoi: To the Muse" which he wrote in 1859. He had in earlier years

followed the flying feet of the Muse through the lovely ways of Nature; his young ear had heard her fresh music blown through

> "Mountains, forests, open downs,
> Lakes, railroads, prairies, states, and towns;"

he had felt her "rhythmic presence fleet and rare," in Senate-hall and court, —

> "Making the Mob a moment fine
> With glimpses of their own Divine;"

above all he had felt her graciousness at home,

> "With that sweet serious undertone
> Of duty, music all her own."

Now he was to fulfill the Muse's behest, —

> "The epic of a man rehearse,
> Be something better than thy verse."

So in losing himself, he was, poetically, to find himself.

In August, 1859, Mr. Phillips, of the firm of Phillips and Sampson, died, and soon after the business went into the hands of an assignee. A few months later some of the more important copyrights of Phillips, Sampson and Company, and the "Atlantic Monthly" were bought by the distinguished publishing house of Ticknor and Fields. Lowell continued for a time in the editorial chair, but in the course of a couple of

years it seemed better to the owners that Mr. Fields, who was peculiarly qualified for the post by his intimate relation to the best writers of the day, should assume the editorship in person. In May, 1861, Lowell gave up the position with cheerful regret.

"I wish you all joy of your worm," he wrote to Fields. "You will find it no bad apprenticeship or prelude for that warmer and more congenial world to which all successful publishers are believed by devout authors to go. I was going to say I was glad to be rid of my old man of the sea. But I don't believe I am. I doubt if we see the finger of Providence so readily in the stoppage of salary as in its beginning or increment. . . . I wish to say in black and white that I am perfectly satisfied with the arrangements you have made. You will be surprised before long to find how easily you get on without me, and wonder that you ever thought me a necessity. It is amazing how quickly the waters close over one. He carries down with him the memory of his splash and struggle, and fancies it is still going on when the last bubble even has burst long ago." [1]

Lowell continued to be a regular contributor to the "Atlantic" in verse and prose until 1864. In January, 1864, he began to edit the "North

[1] *Letters*, vol. ii, pp. 58, 59.

American Review," jointly with Mr. Norton; thenceforward most of his literary and political papers appeared in this journal. In those days the "North American" was a Boston quarterly of a prodigious gravity. The new editors gave it fresh distinction and readableness. Mr. Norton was the active editor, and the new editorial connection was chiefly momentous to Lowell in still further solidifying his position as a public man, and in affording him a vehicle for literary essays of a scope and amplitude that even the "Atlantic" would have found "unmagazinable," as the slang of editorial offices puts it.

His own life at Elmwood flowed in the old equable course, though its waters ran deep, and, for all the rippling play of humor on the surface, were fed from bitter springs. Three of his nephews, Charles Russell Lowell, James Jackson Lowell, and William Lowell Putnam, went to the war. Lieutenant Putnam was killed in the front of battle at Ball's Bluff in October, 1861; Lieutenant James Jackson Lowell was mortally wounded at Glendale, Virginia, in June, 1862; and Charles Russell Lowell, who rose to the rank of Brigadier General, died in October, 1864, from wounds received at the battle of Cedar Creek. No sorrow since the death of his children and the wife of his youth had touched Lowell so nearly as this.

He still found refreshment in nature, comfort in his various work, and relaxation in friendly converse and letter writing; but his deepest joy in those dark years must have been in the expression of the war-time mood that gave us his best political essays, "The Washers of the Shroud," the second series of the "Biglow Papers," and the "Commemoration Ode."

Although the burden of the first series of the "Biglow Papers" had been a plea for peace in a time of what seemed to Lowell unrighteous war, he was never a supine peace lover; and even at the time he was writing such lines as —

> "Ez fer war, I call it murder, —
> There you hev it plain an' flat;
> I don't want to go no furder
> Than my Testyment fer that,"

he could still, in his Palfrey poem, mention the advantages of a "whiff of Naseby." In 1857, after the Dred Scott decision, he wrote to Mr. Norton: "So now the lists are open, and we shall soon find where the tougher lance-shafts are grown, North or South." He did not at that time, of course, foresee the purging tragedy of war that the country was to undergo, but he was keenly aware of the momentousness of the things that were at stake in America, and of the magnitude of the approaching crisis. In 1858 he printed in the "Atlantic" four very notable

political articles: "Mr. Buchanan's Administration," in April; "The American Tract Society," in July; "The Pocket Celebration of the Fourth," in August; and "A Sample of Consistency," in November. In 1859 his preoccupations were more with pure literature, and he wrote no prose articles dealing with the situation, although his deepening mood may be seen in his poem, "Italy, 1859," which appeared in the December number of that year. In 1860 he returned to the attack with an article on "The New Tariff Bill," in the "Atlantic" for July, an admirable paper upon "The Election in November," in the October number, and in the last number for the year "A Plea for Freedom from Speech and Figures of Speech-Makers," in which he made some untimely fun of Wendell Phillips, under the name of Philip Vandel. In 1861, after the war had at last been precipitated, he published four political papers in the "Atlantic:" "The Question of the Hour," "E Pluribus Unum," "The Pickens-and-Stealin's Rebellion," and "Self-Possession *vs.* Prepossession;" and in November of that year he printed in the "Atlantic" one of the noblest of his war poems, "The Washers of the Shroud." Written as it was in a week of sharp anxiety for his beloved nephews at the front, this breathes for the first time the full depth of Lowell's patriotic

passion. In its sonorous penultimate stanza we see how wholly he was rapt by the stern aspiration of the war: —

"'God, give us peace! not such as lulls to sleep,
But sword on thigh, and brow with purpose knit!
And let our Ship of State to harbor sweep,
Her ports all up, her battle-lanterns lit,
And her leashed thunders gathering for their leap!'"

For the two years from 1862 to 1864 Lowell's writing upon the war was confined to the second series of the "Biglow Papers," which appeared in the "Atlantic Monthly," his "Two Scenes from the Life of Blondel," and the memorial poem to Shaw; but when he undertook the editorship of the "North American Review" in 1864, he began again to deal with the issues of the day in prose. In that year he printed in the "North American Review:" "The President's Policy," "McClellan's Report," "The Rebellion: Its Causes and Consequences," and "The Next General Election," afterward entitled "McClellan or Lincoln?" In 1865 he wrote for the "Review" his thoughtful paper on "Reconstruction," and "Scotch the Snake or Kill It;" and in the following year "The President on the Stump" and "The Seward-Johnson Reaction."

This completes the tale of Lowell's war-time writing in prose. These articles, only a small

part of which were reprinted in his volume of "Political Essays," are certainly the most stimulating and brilliant group of political papers that American literature has to show. They bear in some respects a curious likeness to his first political writing in the "Anti-Slavery Standard" fifteen years earlier, though they show a remarkable growth in power and precision of workmanship. He is still not always able to control his wit and fancy; but it is seldom that he is led into an ineffective *jeu d'esprit* or excursus. His humor is more often of a delightfully warm and persuasive cast, as where he writes in his scathing examination of McClellan's report that "the dear old domestic bird, the Public, which lays the golden eggs out of which greenbacks are hatched, was sure she had brooded out an eagle chick at last." Such glows of humor alternate with flights of imaginative eloquence of the most stirring kind, in which the analogical faculty of the poet finds expression in some heightened similitude. What, for example, could be better than this of Lincoln?

"The imputation of inconsistency is one to which every sound politician and every honest thinker must sooner or later subject himself. The foolish and the dead alone never change their opinion. The course of a great statesman resembles that of navigable rivers, avoiding im-

movable obstacles with noble bends of concession, seeking the broad levels of opinion on which men soonest settle and longest dwell, following and marking almost imperceptible slopes of national tendency, yet always aiming at direct advances, always recruited from sources nearer heaven, and sometimes bursting open paths of progress and fruitful human commerce through what seemed the eternal barriers of both."

Perhaps the single most instructive phenomenon running through all these political essays is Lowell's growing appreciation of the greatness of Lincoln. At his nomination Lowell, like nearly all the Boston and Cambridge men, regretted that Seward had not been the candidate, and in the first months of the war Lincoln's "noble bends of concession" ill suited Lowell's ardent hope of sudden victory and pacification. But it was not long before the poet's intuition divined the true nature of the great man at Washington. As he proudly boasted twenty years later, he was the first of his circle to see that here indeed was one of Plutarch's men. As soon as Lowell found himself more warmly in sympathy with the policy of the administration, his political writing in prose gained perceptibly in earnestness and efficiency. Taken as a whole, his articles, with all their wealth of literary background and with all their personal flavor of

whimsicality, embody perfectly the Lincolnian mood; for while they are winged with a mystical democracy which often carries their author to a lofty Pisgah of political vision, they always come back to the ideal of a conservative democracy grounded upon an "allegiance to the sober will of the majority, concentrated in established forms and distributed by legitimate channels."

But important as was Lowell's prose writing during the years of the struggle for the Union, his war poetry was more important still. It was in the second series of "Biglow Papers" and in the "Commemoration Ode" that he expressed the whole heart of the North and performed the greatest public service. To understand aright the mood of the "Biglow Papers," second series, we must remember that fusion of ideality and racy humor which made Lowell's idiosyncrasy. At the very time, for example, when he was writing with the most earnest emotion of the stern issues of war, he wrote to a friend, after dining with a distinguished French visitor, in such a vein of pure fooling as this: —

"I sat next to Colonel Ragon, who led the forlorn hope at the taking of Malakoff and was at the siege of Rome. He was a very pleasant fellow. (I don't feel quite sure of my English yet — J'ai tant parlé Français que je trouve

beaucoup de difficulté à m'y déshabituer.) Pendant — I mean during — the dinner Ooendel Homes récitait des vers vraiment jolis. Il arrivait déjà au bout, quand M. Ragon, se tournant vers moi d'un air mêlé d'intelligence et d'interrogation, et à la même fois d'un Colomb qui fait la découverte d'un monde tout nouveau, s'écria, 'C'est en vers, Monsieur, n'est-ce pas?' St'anegdot charmang j'ai rahcontay ah Ooendel daypwee, avec days eclah de reer." And in 1862 he could still play "bat, bat, come into my hat" of an evening on the lawn. It was this many-sidedness, sometimes, perhaps, a source of weakness in him, that made possible so rare a work as the second series of the "Biglow Papers."

After Mr. Fields assumed the editorship of the "Atlantic" in 1861, he was continually urging Lowell to send him poetry, and he seconded a suggestion that had been made before that it would be greatly to the advantage of the "Atlantic" if Parson Wilbur could be induced to procure more verses from Hosea Biglow. At first Lowell looked upon this suggestion with much misgiving. As he wrote to a correspondent when the idea was first proposed to him: —

"As for new 'Biglow Papers,' God knows how I should like to write them, if they would only *make* me as they did before. But I am so occupied and bothered that I have no time to

brood, which with me is as needful a preliminary to hatching anything as with a clucking hen. However, I am going to try my hand and see what will come of it."

With his freedom from editorial occupation Lowell seems to have found at last a little brooding time. In the fall of 1861 he wrote the first paper in the new series, the letter of Birdofredum Sawin, Esq., to Mr. Hosea Biglow, which, with the humorously pathetic senile letter from Parson Wilbur, pregnant with the feeling of the war, appeared in the "Atlantic" for January, 1862. For five months the following five of the second series of "Biglow Papers" appeared without intermission. After a break of half a year, the "Latest Views of Mr. Biglow" appeared in the "Atlantic" for February, 1863. "Mr. Hosea Biglow to the Editor of the 'Atlantic Monthly'" was published in April, 1865, and "Mr. Hosea Biglow's Speech in March Meeting" in the May of 1866. The whole of the new series, with some augmentation, was printed in a volume in 1867.

Despite Lowell's affirmation that "We hear no good of the posthumous Lazarus," the second series of the "Biglow Papers" is undoubtedly a riper achievement than the first. Something of the old boyish unction and high spirits has departed, but this is more than compensated for by

greater variety and a higher flight. Absorbed by the sense of a vaster, more vital occasion, Lowell contrived to put his deepest and truest self into the prose of Parson Wilbur and the poetry of Hosea more effectively than he had been able to do at the slighter occasion of the Mexican War. Indeed, the second series is in every part more lyrical, less dramatic than the first. Even in Parson Wilbur's letters, Lowell often drops the mask of tremulous old age and speaks in his own proper person. In the introduction to the Mason and Slidell "Idyll," for instance, the greater part of the Parson's letter is a perfectly straightforward expression of Lowell's view of the attitude of England toward the American conflict, written, save for a slight recollection of his rôle at the end, in his own habitual manner. Although in the delightful character of the Reverend Jared Hitchcock, so subtly differentiated from that of Parson Wilbur, as well as in the specimens of Wilbur's table-talk, he returned again to a masterly dramatization of his characters, the reader of the "Biglow Papers" to-day feels that Lowell is personally expressed in their prose no less than in their verse. Of the lyrical intensity of the latter there is little need to speak. How vividly is his true genius shown in such passages as that dewy account of the coming of spring in "Sunthin'

in the Pastoral Line," with its charming picture of his best-loved bird: —

" 'nuff sed, June's bridesman, poet o' the year,
Gladness on wings, the bobolink, is here;
Half-hid in tip-top apple-blooms he swings,
Or climbs aginst the breeze with quiverin' wings,
Or, givin' way to 't in a mock despair,
Runs down, a brook o' laughter, thru the air," —

or in the stanzas of poignant sorrow for his nephews killed in battle: —

" Why, hain't I held 'em on my knee?
Did n't I love to see 'em growin',
Three likely lads ez wal could be,
Hahnsome an' brave an' not tu knowin'?
I set an' look into the blaze
Whose natur', jes' like theirn, keeps climbin',
Ez long 'z it lives, in shinin' ways,
An' half despise myself for rhymin'.

" Wut 's words to them whose faith an' truth
On War's red techstone rang true metal,
Who ventered life an' love an' youth
For the gret prize o' death in battle?
To him who, deadly hurt, agen
Flashed on afore the charge's thunder,
Tippin' with fire the bolt of men
Thet rived the Rebel line asunder?"

So in these later " Biglow Papers " we feel the vital stirring of the mind of Lowell as it was moved by the great war; and if they never had quite the popular reverberation of the first

series, they made deeper impression, and are a more priceless possession of our literature.

In April, 1865, peace was at last declared; on the 13th of that month Lowell wrote to Mr. Norton: —

"The news, my dear Charles, is from Heaven. I felt a strange and tender exaltation. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry, and ended by holding my peace and feeling devoutly thankful. There is something magnificent in having a country to love. It is almost like what one feels for a woman. Not so tender, perhaps, but to the full as self-forgetful."

Three months later on the greatest occasion of his life, Lowell was to give expression to this strange and tender exaltation in the Ode, which if not his most perfect, is surely his noblest and most splendid work. Harvard College was to hold on July 21 a day of memorial exercises in commemoration of her ninety-three sons who had been killed in the War of Nationality. Lowell was chosen to compose and recite the chief poem of the day. For some weeks his Muse was backward, and he could write nothing. Then, of a sudden, as has been often told, the mighty mood of the occasion came upon him and swept him along so resistlessly that in two days he had written the entire Ode, — with the exception of

the Lincoln strophe which was a latter addition, — pretty much as it now stands. As he wrote to Miss Norton: —

"I eat and smoke and sleep and go through all the nobler functions of a man mechanically still, and wonder at myself as at something outside of and alien to Me. For have I not worked myself lean on an 'Ode for Commemoration?' Was I not so rapt with the fervor of conception as I have not been these ten years, losing my sleep, my appetite, and my flesh, those attributes to which I before alluded as nobly uniting us in a common nature with our kind."[1]

The memorial exercises of the day were of a sort to move men greatly. They began with a solemn procession, the meaning of whose sad march has been set forth by a young American historian with memorable eloquence: —

"We should have lifted our hats in reverence if we had come upon the line of it. For it marched at a funeral pace, and the music it kept step by was a dirge, at once the mournfulest and most exultant strain that Harvard's walls have ever echoed with.

"The procession must move slowly, for there were halt and fever-stricken men — young men,

[1] For some curious anecdotes concerning the composition and delivery of the *Commemoration Ode* see Scudder, vol. ii, pp. 63–73.

but veterans — in the ranks. It formed in a hall whose foundations were not yet laid when the pavilion of 1836 was set up on the neighboring slope. From old Gore Hall, the higher, western part of the present library, and the first building to arise in the new quadrangle, it moved out through lines of students and graduates, who in turn fell in behind. Colonel Henry Lee, who had been there in 1836 also, was at the head; after him walked the governor and president and guests and dignitaries, and then, marshaled by classes, the sons of Harvard who had come back alive from the great war for the Union. The procession entered the old quadrangle at the corner between University Hall on the right and the new Gray's Hall on the left, turned to the right, and passed in front of University, as though it were seeking Appleton Chapel, the new place of worship, but kept on, instead, around the quadrangle, out through the gate, and into the meeting house, where all stood waiting while Bartlett, '62, a major-general at twenty-five, — fittest representative of those whom the occasion was meant to honor, but who could not themselves be there, since they lay dead on Southern fields, for he also had left a leg and an arm behind him, — hobbled slowly down the aisle. One whom Harvard had won from her great rival, Yale, and who has often, like other captives, been set to making

music for his captors, was there to direct the singing of new songs, and there was a fitting address; but what is remembered best, though the words are not preserved, is the prayer which a young clergyman, who towered up above all that stood to pray, Phillips Brooks, of the class of 1855, shook out, as was his wont, from his great throat, which was yet too small for the passion of his utterance — a matchless prayer of resignation and of triumph."[1]

It was after such a prelude that Lowell arose to pronounce his Ode. Some in the audience were thrilled and shaken by it as Lowell himself was shaken in its delivery. Yet he seems to have felt with some reason that it was not a complete and immediate success. Nor is this cause for wonder. The passion of the poem was too ideal, its woven harmonies too subtle to be readily communicated to so large an audience, mastered and mellowed though it was by a single deep mood. Nor was Lowell's elocution quite that of the deep-mouthed odist[2] capable of interpreting such organ tones of verse. But no sooner was the poem published with the matchless Lincoln strophe inserted than its greatness and nobility were manifest.

[1] W. G. Brown, *The Foe of Compromise and other Essays*, pp. 197, 198.

[2] "*Ruit profundo*
Pindarus ore," Parson Wilbur would have recalled.

The poetic qualities of the Ode, and its place among the great occasional poems of the world, will presently concern us; viewing it in its place in Lowell's life we have but to notice how it swept together all that was best in him. Three of the ninety-three young soldiers for whom the old college so proudly and tenderly mourned were of his own blood. So his sensitive poet's soul, touched by personal loss, partook of the grief, the sorrowful elation, of half a million homes. His old mystical democracy, reassured by the outcome of the bitter trial, speaks with a more sure conviction, and, despite the wealth of subtle literary reminiscence, with a national accent that is paralleled only in the speeches of Lincoln.

It was truly a great occasion, and it sublimed Lowell into a great poet. In the "Commemoration Ode," his poetry, so frequently touched with caducity, wins to a "high immunity from night." Until the dream of human brotherhood is forgotten, the echo of its large music will not wholly die away.

2. *The North American Review.*

As the passions of the war faded, the mood with which Lowell looked out upon the world became again much what it had been seven years before: bookish, amused, a little skeptical, but

still ready on occasion to flame with earnest feeling. The cynical comedy of reconstruction, coming after the tragedy of war, pained him deeply; but for nearly ten years he was so engaged with his old bookish vocation that, save for a few caustic squibs in "The Nation," he wrote little upon public affairs. His position as editor of a quarterly like the "North American" gave him an opportunity, such as no other critic in America had ever enjoyed, to print literary studies of a spaciousness comparable to those in the English "Quarterly" or the "Revue des Deux Mondes;" and he made the most of his opportunity. Now working over and combining old college lectures, now making some contemporary publication the occasion for fifteen thousand words or more of exposition and homily, he had in print by 1876 practically all of those bookish essays which are perhaps his least corruptible monument.

The tale of the essays is worth taking account of. In 1866 he printed in the "North American Review" "Carlyle's 'Frederick the Great'" and "Swinburne's Tragedies;" in 1867 his "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists" and "Lessing;" and, as was ever his custom, he sent to the "Atlantic Monthly" of November in that year his shorter, more "magazinable" essay upon President Quincy, under the title of "A

Great Public Character." In 1868 he printed in the "North American Review" "Witchcraft," "Shakespeare Once More," and "Dryden;" and in "The Nation" the brief article upon Mr. Emerson's New Course of Lectures, which was afterwards expanded into one of the most admirable of his essays. In 1869 there was a break in this succession of literary papers, though he contributed in that year "A Good Word for Winter" to "The Atlantic Almanac" (dated 1870), and his telling essay "On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners" to the "Atlantic Monthly." In 1870 the completed review of Hazlitt's "Library of Old Authors"[1] appeared in

[1] There will be occasion elsewhere to speak of the quality of Lowell's criticism as it is displayed in these essays. It may be noted here that the peculiar animus which is discoverable in the notice of the "Library of Old Authors" is not wholly due to the irritating errors in which that set undoubtedly abounded. The component single reviews of which this article is made up had appeared in the *Atlantic* and the *North American Review* in war-time, and a part of their spirit was doubtless due to Lowell's deep resentment of the attitude of England toward this country. As a lover of English letters whose mood was much colored by that of the old home, he had naturally felt the unfairness of England's position the more keenly. This perhaps led him to that relentless and cutting criticism which in this essay certainly passed the bounds of good literary manners. The same feeling undoubtedly colored the inadequate treatment of Carlyle in the *North American Review* in 1866. It is worth adding that Lowell wrote no letters to England between 1861 and 1866. The recently pub-

the "North American Review" for April, and the study of "Chaucer" in the number for July. In the spring of that year he collected the first of his volumes of essays about literature in "Among My Books."

In the "North American Review" for January, 1871, appeared the essay on Pope; and the second volume of essays, "My Study Windows," appeared in the fall of that year. In 1872 appeared the review of Masson's "Life of John Milton" and Miss Rossetti's "Shadow of Dante," which was afterwards slightly expanded into what is perhaps the most amply adequate of all of Lowell's larger ventures in this kind. After a silent period of two years during which he was abroad, Lowell's "Spenser" was printed in the "North American Review" for April, 1875. In 1876 he published the third volume of literary essays — the second series of "Among My Books." Save for his latest literary essays, published at the very end of his life and collected posthumously, the tale of his important critical writing is now complete.

He did not cease to write poetry, and much of his most characteristic verse appeared in the same period. He was frequently printing poems

lished letters of Ruskin to Mr. Norton show how difficult the estrangement of men like Ruskin and Carlyle made the attitude of American men of letters toward them.

in the "Atlantic Monthly," of which some were collected in "Under the Willows and Other Poems" in 1869, some in "Heartsease and Rue" in 1887. In 1870 appeared "The Cathedral;" in 1874 his "Agassiz;" in 1875 his "Ode Read at the Concord Centennial" and "Under the Old Elm;" and in 1876 "An Ode for the Fourth of July." The last three were published together in his "Three Memorial Poems" in 1877.

The reader of Lowell's letters can scarcely fail to discover that the ten years following the war were, all things considered, the happiest time of his life. In July, 1866, he wrote to Mr. Norton: —

"The older I grow, the more I am convinced that there are no satisfactions so deep and so permanent as our sympathies with outward nature. I have not said just what I meant, for we are thrilled even more by any spectacle of human heroism. But the others seem to bind our lives together by a more visible and unbroken chain of purifying and softening emotion. In this way the flowering of the buttercups is always a great and I may truly say religious event in my year. But I am talking too unguardedly. You know what a deep distrust I have of the poetic temperament, with its self deceptions, its real unrealities, and its power of sometimes unblessed magic, building its New Jerusalem in a

sunset cloud rather than in the world of actualities and man." [1]

It is clear that Lowell, having now turned himself more wholly to prose and bridled his poetic temperament, as it were, was finding in the world of actuality and man a more solid satisfaction than he had known before. Yet his quick response to the moods of nature and his undying poetic idealism still kept him from settling into a merely prosaic middle age.

With that boyishness which was his lifelong characteristic he whimsically laments the stealing approach of age, or tries, sometimes with equal whimsicality, to act his rôle. "I have long been of that philosopher's opinion," he says in one place, "who held that nothing was of much consequence;" and again, "I shall have to subside ere long into the heavy father parts. My very style belongs to the last century." In another place he says sadly that his wit has been "altered from percussion to flint." But these things were never quite true. For though Lowell was now a middle-aged professor and critic, he was still Hosea Biglow as well as Parson Wilbur. He could still, as in his translations of F. J. Child's "Il Pesceballo" (*Anglice* Fishball), show a rollicking word jugglery little diminished from the days of the "Fable for Critics." No-

[1] *Letters*, vol. ii, p. 125.

where does the nature of the man as it was at this time appear more vividly than in a reminiscence of Mr. Howells's: —

"If I dropped in upon him in the afternoon I was apt to find him reading the old French poets, or the plays of Calderon, or the 'Divina Commedia,' which he magnanimously supposed me much better acquainted with than I was because I knew some passages of it by heart. One day I came in quoting

> 'Io son, cantava, io son dolce Sirena,
> Che i marinai in mezzo al mar dismago.'

He stared at me in a rapture with the matchless music, and then uttered all his adoration and despair in one word. 'Damn!' he said, and no more. I believe he instantly proposed a walk that day, as though his study walls with all their vistas into the great literatures cramped his soul, liberated to a sense of the ineffable beauty of the *sommo poeta*." [1]

Perhaps, too, these were the years in which Lowell was most happy in his friendships. As he wrote to Mr. Thomas Bailey Aldrich: —

"Think of me after I am gone on (for in the nature of things you will survive me) as one who had a really friendly feeling for everything

[1] *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, New York, Harper & Bros.

human. It is better to be a good fellow than a good poet, and perhaps (I am not sure) I might have showed a pretty fair talent that way with proper encouragement." And writing to Mr. Norton a little later he says : —

" It is always my happiest thought that with all my drawbacks of temperament (of which no one is more keenly conscious than myself) I have never lost a friend. For I would rather be loved than anything else in the world. I always thirst after affection, and depend more on the expression of it than is altogether wise."

In the period of his first poetic flowering time, which was also that of his first domestic happiness at Elmwood, as well as in the later years of his English mission and after, there were constraints and preoccupations which sometimes hindered Lowell from giving of himself quite freely to old friends, or coming into that precipitate intimacy with new ones toward which one side of his nature inclined. In these periods, the first and last, the friendship of women meant more to him than that of any men, save two or three. In the middle time, of which we are now writing, from 1857 to 1877, Lowell was perhaps most himself, — less subject to the perturbations of the poetic temperament than he had been in earlier years, and a little less upon his dignity than he was after his diplomatic career.

He was, as the frontispiece of this book shows abundantly, an easy, sincere, altogether human man, wise, as all the records prove, in that deep practice of friendship which seems sadly in the way of becoming one of the lost arts.

In the summer of 1870 Lowell received a visit from Thomas Hughes, who had acted as the English sponsor of the "Biglow Papers," and it is significant to note that this most hearty and human of the English Victorian writers was, with the exception of Leslie Stephen, the one to draw out from Lowell in his letters the warmest expressions of affection.

Lowell's pursuits in the three years from 1869 to 1872 were mingled as usual of writing and lecturing, with, for a time, a new infusion of business cares. He was indeed at this time a little harassed in money matters. In order to have some measure of freedom from the pressure of academic routine, he had arranged with the authorities at Harvard to grant him a tutor, on the consideration of his resigning a generous portion of his salary. As his income from the "North American Review" and his books was not large, and as the thirty heavily taxed acres of his Elmwood estate, on which he had done only a little gentleman farming, made him land poor, he found his situation for a time rather difficult. He endeavored at first to eke out an

adequate income by lecturing, and went to Baltimore for that purpose, and also to the newly founded Cornell University. Eventually, however, he saw that it would be the part of business wisdom to sell the greater portion of his land. After a good deal of work and worry, to which he frequently refers in his published and unpublished letters, he finally arranged in 1871 to sell some twenty-five acres for a price that he hoped would give him an established income of five thousand dollars a year. Later it shrank to about four thousand. This latter amount, however, was sufficient to give him greater ease of mind and a new freedom. He proposed to the Harvard authorities to take his sabbatical year abroad; and as he had been teaching without interruption for sixteen years he hoped that they might consent to grant him two years' absence on half pay. This, however, the authorities refused to consider; and so Lowell tendered his formal resignation in the spring of 1872. It was provisionally accepted, and on the 9th of July, after having seen his daughter Mabel married three months before to Mr. Edward Burnett of Southborough, and having finished his essay on Dante, which appeared in the July number of the "North American Review," he sailed in company with Mrs. Lowell for his third visit to Europe.

To the student of Lowell's literary career, the two years he spent in Europe from 1872 to 1874 are, like his previous visits, not very significant. But to one who could fully understand the fluctuation of his mood as a man, they are of considerable moment. With the exception of his Agassiz memorial poem, Lowell wrote nothing during his stay abroad, and this vacancy from literary pursuits, as well as his freedom from academic work after so many years of constant labor, seems to have had a not altogether happy reaction upon his frame of mind. The prevailing tone of his letters during these years was, as always, cheerful; but reading between the lines we can see that his mood partook more and more of a sombre melancholy. This was doubtless due in part to causes in his physical life, as well as to the reaction from his busy and various routine. Up to this time his health had been extraordinarily robust. As he frequently boasted, he never took a pill until he was fifty; and there is a tradition that he never wore an overcoat in the coldest Cambridge weather; though this is questionable, for there is another tradition that he habitually wore a pea-jacket. At any rate, save for occasional migraine, which doubtless came from the excessive use of his eyes, he never had any grave or chronic ailment. During his stay abroad, however, he developed more

marked symptoms of a disease which, hitherto regarded as a sort of joke, was to harass him intermittently until his death. Writing to his nephew-in-law, Mr. George Putnam, from Paris in 1874, he says: —

"The doctor in Rome, however, gave my troubles a name, — and that by robbing them of mystery has made them commonplace. He said it was *suppressed gout*. It has a fancy of gripping me in the stomach sometimes, holding on like a slow fire for seven hours at a time. It is wonderful how one gets used to things, however. But it seems to be growing lighter, and I hope to come home robust and red."

There was, notwithstanding, much in his European visit to cause Lowell happiness. The first months were spent in England, where he renewed many old friendships very happily. Thence in the autumn the Lowells went to Paris, where they established themselves in a quaint Parisian hotel, the Hôtel de Lorraine, at No. 7 Rue de Beaune, which was ever afterwards to be his headquarters in the French capital, and where a photograph of him, it is said, still hangs. There he was joined in a few weeks by the Nortons, and a little later by John Holmes, most Lambish of humorists, and the Emersons. So he spent the winter, cheered by such friendly associations, reading steadily at his old French,

studying the antiquities of Paris, and buying books. In the spring of 1873 he crossed to England, where he received the honorary degree of D. C. L. at Oxford. This was a deep pleasure to him, though he characteristically lamented that his father could never have seen this decoration in the Harvard Triennial Catalogue.

After a summer spent in Switzerland and Germany, the Lowells went to Italy for the winter. They journeyed first to Venice, and then to Florence, where the news of the death of Agassiz startled them. At this Lowell's poetic powers, after their years of brooding disuse, were quickened again into intense productive activity, so that he wrote his Agassiz memorial poem in a rapt mood such as he had not known since the composition of the "Commemoration Ode." From this sudden flood of feeling the Agassiz ode drew a volume of rich tone and deep emotion that sometimes even surpasses that of the "Commemoration Ode" itself. Lowell's own account of the psychologic genesis of this poem is too important to be omitted. Writing to Mr. Norton from Rome a few weeks later, he says: —

"A very deep chord had been touched also at Florence by the sight of our old lodgings in the Casa Guidi, of the balcony Mabel used to run on, and windows we used to look out at so long

ago. I got sometimes into the mood I used to be in when I was always repeating to myself, —

> 'King Pandion he is dead;
> All *thy* friends are lapt in lead,' —

phrases which seem to me desolately pathetic. At last I began to hum over bits of my poem in my head till it took complete possession of me and worked me up to a delicious state of excitement, all the more delicious as my brain (or at any rate the musical part of it) had been lying dormant so long. I could n't sleep, and when I walked out I saw nothing outward. My old trick of seeing things with my eyes shut after I had gone to bed (I mean whimsical things utterly alien to the train of my thought, — for example, a hospital ward with a long row of white untenanted beds, and on the farthest a pile of those little wooden dolls with red-painted slippers) revived in full force. Nervous, horribly nervous, but happy for the first time (I mean consciously happy) since I came over here. And so by degrees my poem worked itself out. The parts came to me as I came awake, and I wrote them down in the morning. I had all my bricks, but the mortar would n't *set*, as the masons say. However, I got it into order at last."[1]

[1] *Letters*, vol. ii, pp. 324, 325.

In February, 1874, the Lowells went down to Rome, where they stayed for a month with the Storys. Thence, after a brief Italian *giro*, they returned to their cosy Parisian hotel.

Throughout the spring there had been a question of the possibility of Lowell's returning to his chair at Harvard. He had been a little hurt by the circumstances of his leaving, and he did not feel irresistibly drawn to bind himself again with the old academic routine. At last, though with a good deal of misgiving, he agreed again to accept the post and began to think of going home. This seems to have been an increasingly pleasant thought; for, as he had written to Mr. Aldrich from Paris the year before: "Cambridge is better, as the rivers of Damascus were better than Jordan. There is no place like it, no, not even for taxes!"

The Lowells left Paris early in June, 1874. They stopped in England, and Lowell went to Cambridge to receive the degree of Doctor of Laws. There, as he rejoiced in a letter to Hughes: "Everybody was as warm as the day was cool," and he added, "When I go home I shall try to be half as good as the orator said I was." They sailed homeward from Liverpool on the 23d of June, 1874, and reached Elmwood on the 4th of July.

Despite his misgivings, Lowell seems to have taken up his university work with a good deal of pleasure, and his letters are full of his delight at being home again among the familiar books and birds of Elmwood. Of the Elmwood landscape he wrote to Mrs. S. B. Herrick, of Baltimore, a new correspondent with whom he had developed a swift friendship : —

" It is what my eye first looked on, and I trust will look on last. A group of tall pines, planted by my father, and my lifelong friends, murmurs to me as I write with messages out of the past and mysterious premonitions of the future. My wife's flowers recall her sweetly to me in her absence from home, and the leaves of her morning-glories that shelter the verandah where I sit whisper of her. A horse-chestnut, of which I planted the seed more than fifty years ago, lifts its huge stack of shade before me and loves me with all its leaves.[1] I should be as happy as a humming-bird were I not printing another volume of essays."

But the matter of the chiefest significance in Lowell's life in the years between 1874 and 1877 is that of his reëmergence in American politics. During his sojourn in Europe he had been continually harassed by the necessity of explaining

[1] This recalls queerly that offending sentence of Thoreau's which Lowell struck out of " Chesuncook." See p. 140.

and apologizing for the flagrant civil and political crimes which had cropped out during the second administration of Grant. In his "Agassiz" the two lines which now read, —

> "The Land of Honest Abraham serves of late
> To teach the Old World how to wait,"

read in the original manuscript,

> "The Land of Broken Promise," etc.

At the earnest solicitation of his friends, Lowell softened the stinging phrase; but the bitterness of his disappointment persisted. After his return from Europe he printed in "The Nation" a series of biting epigrams, in which the evil of the public condonation of such crimes as those of Tweed and Fisk is caustically touched. This stirred a storm of newspaper reproach, and there was much vulgar complaining that Lowell had foregathered to his harm with lords and dukes, had lost his old Americanism, and become an apostate from Republican principles. His letters at this time were full of his sorrow for such an attack, but his true apologia was in the first part of that epistle to Curtis written in 1874, which was finished and published with a postscript in 1887. In it he writes: —

> "I love too well the pleasures of retreat
> Safe from the crowd and cloistered from the street;
> The fire that whispers its domestic joy,
> Flickering on walls that knew me still a boy," —

ELMWOOD

so he runs on in a vivid picture of the charm of his familiar life at Elmwood, and then turns to the damning catalogue of those noisome public evils which have forced him to break his scholarly quiet to utter wholesome, unpopular truth: —

"Office a fund for ballot-brokers made,
To pay the drudges of their gainful trade;
Our cities taught what conquered cities feel
By ædiles chosen that they might safely steal;
And gold, however got, a title fair
To such respect as only gold can bear.
I seem to see this; how shall I gainsay
What all our journals tell me every day?
Poured our young martyrs their high-hearted blood
That we might trample to congenial mud
The soil with such a legacy sublimed?
Methinks an angry scorn is here well-timed:
Where find retreat? How keep reproach at bay?
Where'er I turn some scandal fouls the way."

But Lowell's political poetry, even at this time, never lost its constructive poetical idealism in mere diatribe. The three fine odes — that read at the Concord Centennial, that read Under the Old Elm on the Hundredth Anniversary of Washington's Taking Command of the American Army, and the "Ode for the Fourth of July, 1876" — breathe still, for all their passages of discouragement, the old winged aspiration of those who know

"Life's bases rest
Beyond the probe of chemic test."

Lowell also began at this time to bear a more active part in practical politics. As the hotly contested election of 1876 approached, the more independent wing of the Republican party in Cambridge organized for the purpose of defeating the nomination of Blaine, who was then at the height both of his political popularity and of his notoriety on account of his dubious connection with the franchise and the securities of the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railroad. Lowell was urged to take an active part in this campaign, and he consented. A draft of a speech made by him at a preliminary caucus has been preserved.[1] It begins with an academic neatness which has a singular sound in this sort of composition: —

"I do not propose," he says, "to make a speech. Still less shall I try to captivate your ears or win your applauses by any of those appeals to passion and prejudice which are so tempting and so unwise. Politics are the most serious of all human affairs, and I prefer the approval of your understandings to that of your hands and feet." So he proceeds to an able plea for an honest independence in politics, and in particular for civil service reform.

His appeal to the understanding was successful. Lowell himself was chosen a delegate to the Republican Convention in Cincinnati, and on the

[1] Scudder, vol. ii, pp. 206–211.

seventh ballot Hayes, not Blaine, received the Republican nomination. Lowell was also named as one of the presidential electors, and, as has been often recounted, he received a high compliment to his political probity and independence when, during the dead-lock which followed the election, he was asked to break it by casting his electoral vote, Republican as he was, for Tilden. There was never in this the slightest suspicion of Lowell's being open to a *quid pro quo*. It was argued that as the election had been stolen from Tilden by fraudulent returns it was the plain duty of an honest Republican elector to restore it to him. Lowell thought rightly, however, that this would have been bad faith to the voters by whom he had been elected; he declined to do so, and the election of Hayes stood, fortunately for the country, to which his services loom larger with every passing year.

CHAPTER V

DIPLOMATIST

1877–1885

1. *Spain.*

With the natural inclination of a man of letters conscious of general powers of a high order, Lowell had been thinking half-whimsically all his life of a public career; and in his familiar letters he had joked about the chances of his election to Congress, or of being sent to represent his country at the Court of St. James. Yet in 1869 he seems to have been a good deal surprised when he received an intimation that owing to the friendly propaganda of Judge Hoar he had come very near being sent as Minister to Spain. In 1876, at the time of the political sally recounted in the last chapter, he was actually urged to stand for Congress. After the election of Hayes was finally established, the talk of sending Lowell abroad was revived. In the usual course of such matters, he was "mentioned" for London, for St. Petersburg, for Berlin, and for Vienna; but finally in the spring of

1877 he was offered the mission to Madrid. The classical account of the circumstances of this arrangement is that by Mr. Howells. It has been often quoted, but it is too significant of Lowell's attitude toward his rôle of diplomatist and too charming in itself to be omitted. Mr. Howells, having some family connection with President Hayes, had written to him that he believed Lowell would accept a diplomatic post. The President replied that he should be gratified if Mr. Howells would find out if Lowell would accept the mission to Austria.

"I lost no time," writes Mr. Howells, "in carrying his letter over to Elmwood, where I found Lowell over his coffee at dinner. He saw me at the threshold, and called to me through the open door to come in, and I handed him the letter, and sat down at the table while he ran it through. When he had read it, he gave a quick 'Ah!' and threw it the length of the table to Mrs. Lowell. She read it in a smiling and loyal reticence, as if she would not say one word of all she might wish in urging his acceptance, though I could see that she was intensely eager for it. The whole situation was of a perfect New England character in its tacit significance; after Lowell had taken his coffee we turned into his study without further allusion to the matter." [1]

[1] *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, p. 238.

A day or two later Lowell went to Mr. Howells's house and told him that he could not accept the Austrian mission, and begged him to make proper acknowledgments to the President; but upon rising to leave he said with a half-whimsical sigh, "I *should* like to see a play of Calderon." This intimation was transmitted by Mr. Howells to Washington along with Lowell's declination of the Austrian mission, and in due time he was appointed to Madrid.

Lowell's characteristic frame of mind toward his new office is seen engagingly in his letters. Writing on June 5, 1877, to his daughter, Mrs. Burnett, a correspondence in which there could have been no suspicion of pose, he said, — "It will be of some use to me in my studies, and I shall not stay there long at any rate. But it is hard to leave Elmwood while it is looking so lovely. The canker worms have burned up all my elms and apple trees . . ." — and thereafter the talk is all of trees and birds, with no further reference to his new honors. Or take him in a little more whimsical vein to a little less intimate correspondent. On July 1, 1877, he wrote to Miss Grace Norton: —

"I dare say I shall enjoy it after I get there, but at present it is altogether a bore to be honorabled at every turn. The world is a droll affair. And yet, between ourselves, dear Grace, I should

be pleased if my father could see me in capitals on the Triennial Catalogue."

Yet Lowell approached his new responsibility in a more sober spirit than would appear from this surface play of his habitual whimsicality. He knew his fitness for the post through his long and intimate knowledge of Spanish literature, which had given him some measure of comprehension of the difficult national mood of Spain, and of the none too accessible Spanish character. He must also have felt a sense of competence to deal with international issues, both because of his legal training and his familiarity with the history and politics of Europe, and because of that larger grasp of political relations which he had convincingly shown in his writings at two great national crises.

Just after his appointment, he was stunned by the death of two of his dearest friends, Miss Jane Norton and Edmund Quincy. So it was in a somewhat sad and sober mood that he sailed from Boston on the 14th of July, 1877. Because of his ministerial dignity he was escorted down the harbor, much to his annoyance, by a revenue cutter and a special tug.

While in Spain Lowell wrote nothing save dispatches, letters, and a sonnet or two, so that it is possible to forget his writing for a time, and

deal wholly with his work as a diplomatist. We must not forget, however, that in the dignified countenance of the American Minister, the shrewd eye of Hosea Biglow still twinkled, and that the hand which turned to writing dispatches about indemnities, or extraditions, was the same that had penned "The Vision of Sir Launfal" and the "Commemoration Ode."

Lowell arrived in Madrid on the 14th of August, 1877, and was presented four days later to the boy king, who was then at his summer palace at La Granja. His welcome was all that he could have wished. Mr. Adee, who was the *chargé d'affaires*, pending Lowell's arrival, says: "In the Spanish eye he came not to continue the disputatious and aggressive policy of Sickles and Cushing, but to revive the amiable traditions of Washington Irving's day." His reception, therefore, was planned for him in his character of man of letters. He was genially hailed by the Spanish press as "José Bighlow," and lines of his poetry were flatteringly quoted to him by the King and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. For the latter, Manuel Silvela, Lowell formed a fast personal friendship. Silvela was a man of fine belletristic taste and considerable erudition. He found Lowell's tobacco excellent, and the two seem to have been more ready to chat about the Cid, Cervantes, or Calderon, than to discuss knotty questions of

international commerce. Moreover, the King, to whom Lowell was accredited, was an eager, gay-hearted boy, and there are reasons to believe that Lowell's own invincible boyishness was sometimes imperfectly veiled by his diplomatic gravity, and that there was a feeling of personal sympathy between the young King and himself that was rather unusual. It is certain, at any rate, that when Lowell, as Minister, extended his country's condolences on the death of Queen Mercedes, and, later, his felicitations on the King's escape from assassination, there was some personal human talk between them that was not at all the customary diplomatic interchange of conventional sentiment assiduously prepared in advance.

Yet for all these pleasant circumstances and associations, Lowell's position at first was far from easy. His acute stomach attacks persistently recurred, and he worried continually over the punctilio of his diplomatic duties. As he wrote to Thomas Hughes: —

"I had a hard row to hoe at first. All alone, without a human being I had ever seen before in my life, and with unaccustomed duties, feeling as if I were beset with snares on every hand, obliged to carry on the greater part of my business in a strange tongue — it was rather trying for a man with so sympathetic and sensitive a temperament as mine, and I don't much wonder

the gout came upon me like an armed man. Three attacks in five months! But now I begin to take things more easily."

In the summer of 1878 Lowell made a brief excursion to Italy, to Greece, where for the first time he saw Athens, and to Turkey. He had been but a week in Athens when, the opportunity occurring for a visit to Constantinople, he very characteristically accepted it; for, as he wrote to Mr. Norton: "I have a theory that peaches have only one good bite in 'em, and that a second spoils *that*. I am glad we went. . . . Our four days at Constantinople were nothing more nor less than so many Arabian Nights."

He returned to Madrid greatly improved in health and spirits. "I have come back," he wrote, "a new man, and have flung my *blue* spectacles into the paler Mediterranean. I really begin to find life at last tolerable here, nay, to enjoy it after a fashion." The course of his Spanish day as it was at this time is outlined in one of his letters: —

"This is the course of my day: — Up at 8, from 9 sometimes till 11 my Spanish professor, at 11 breakfast, at 12 to the legation, at 3 home again and a cup of chocolate, then read the paper and write Spanish till a quarter to 7, at 7 dinner, and at 8 drive in an open carriage in

the Prado till 10, to bed at 12 to 1. In cooler weather we drive in the afternoon. I am very well — cheerful and no gout."

He was greatly pleased about this time at being made a member of the Spanish Academy, where, as he boasted with glee, he could discuss the new edition of the official Spanish dictionary. As time went on, the romantic, half-oriental appeal of the country around Madrid, with its variegated life, its crowding suggestions of the old peninsular literature that he loved best, gave him much happiness. But lest he should grow too easy and happy in his post, fate had sharper troubles than the gout and diplomatic business in store for him. In the winter of 1879 and 1880 Mrs. Lowell fell desperately ill. Her life was many times despaired of, and even when she became at last convalescent, she was left with a disturbance of the brain that, situated as they were in a strange country, preyed savagely upon Lowell's spirits. It is at this time that musings upon the possibility of faith in an age of science began to give more sombre color to some of his letters.

On January 22, 1880, Lowell received a cipher dispatch. His first thought was, as he writes to Mrs. Burnett, "Row in Cuba, I shall have no end of bother." It turned out to be this: "President has nominated you to England. He re-

gards it as essential to the public service that you should accept and make your personal arrangements to repair to London as early as may be. Your friends whom I have conferred with concur in this view." Although a little startled at the suddenness of the promotion, it was from the first very attractive to Lowell. He already had many friends in England, the climate had always agreed with him, and he was particularly anxious to move Mrs. Lowell into a more homelike environment. He arranged to accept, provided two months' delay might be granted him in which to prepare for the change.

Despite the worries and embarrassments of Lowell's stay in Spain, which led him to reiterate in his letters with quaint sadness, "Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin, tu l'as voulu," he had made a marked success of his diplomatic work, and served an excellent apprenticeship for that highest post in his country's diplomatic service to which he was now called. Nowhere else than in Spain could he have been so promptly and effectually initiated into the ceremonial of diplomatic life. At first he was a little amused and a good deal bored by the formalities and the exchange of "infantile" remarks which made up diplomatic conversation. But as time went on he seems to have found more pleasure in the

game, and to have played his part in it with both dignity and discretion.

In the active business of the ministerial office he acquitted himself equally well. His situation in Spain was of a considerable delicacy. The Spanish monarchy had only just been reëstablished after an interregnum of violence; and the filibustering disturbances in Cuba, in which many Americans had been shot without trial, had taken place only three years before, and the ensuing strain in the relations of Spain and America had not yet worn away. There can be no doubt that Lowell did much to establish a more cordial *entente* between the two countries.

Lowell's official dispatches from Spain, some of the more interesting of which were collected by Mr. Joseph B. Gilder and published with an introduction by Mr. Adee in 1899, have the particular distinction of bearing the mark of the Minister's own style, rather than that of his secretary or a *chargé d'affaires*. They are not without a great deal of political sagacity, but they are written in his characteristic epistolary vein — humorous, pathetic, frank, sometimes bookish, with his habitual whimsicality only a little chastened by any sense of occasion. One wonders a little what the Machiavellis of the State Department at Washington in the presidency of Hayes made of a minister who notes with em-

phasis that at a great public function which he is describing the prettiest women were those from Andalusia, and in writing of the sad death of the young Queen casually quotes "the familiar stanza of Malherbe:" —

"Le pauvre en sa cabane qui de chaume se couvre
Est sujet à ses lois,
Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre
N'en défend point nos rois."

However as one of the assistant secretaries at that time was John Hay, there was at least one reader to perceive the aptness of the quotation. Yet, for all their discursiveness, Lowell's dispatches must have served their purpose admirably. Some of his political prophecies for the future of Spain have not yet come true; but his shrewd characterization of the chief figures in Spanish political life, and his happy guesses at their motives, could not have failed to be of the first service to his departmental chiefs at home.

Nevertheless there were many who held that Lowell was in a sense "wasted" at Madrid, and had from the start advocated his transfer to England. The event proved the truth of this conviction; for after growing his diplomatic shell in Spain, he passed to England to perform perhaps as subtle and far-reaching public service as the history of American diplomacy has to record.

2. *England.*

"'What if I send him,' Uncle S., says he,
'To my good cousin whom he calls J. B.?'
A nation's servants go where they are sent;
He heard his Uncle's order and he went.
By what enchantments, what alluring arts,
Our truthful James led captive British hearts, —
Whether his shrewdness made their statesmen halt,
Or if his learning found their Dons at fault,
Or if his virtue was a strange surprise,
Or if his wit flung star-dust in their eyes; —
Like honest Yankees we can simply guess."

So wrote Holmes of Lowell on his return from England; and it would be hard to find a more compact statement of the personal triumph which our author won at the Court of Saint James. He had been preceded there by many eminent men, and by one or two of the first distinction in letters; but none of them performed more notable services than Lowell. He was not, of course, called upon to confront such grave diplomatic crises as those which Mr. Adams a few years before had dealt with so wisely; but he did have to encounter the great intangible body of prejudice against this country which had been aroused by the public scandals of the Reconstruction Period; — and, standing as the representative of his country, he succeeded admirably well in living and laughing this prejudice down.

No minister ever began his career under more satisfactory and friendly auspices than Lowell. As he writes casually soon after his arrival in London in the spring of 1880: "I am overwhelmed already with invitations, though I have not put my arrival in the papers." For all the pain that he had felt over the attitude of England toward America in war-time, and his very frank expression of it, it was the pain of a disappointed admirer rather than of an habitual foe. So he soon found himself very happily at home in London. As he wrote to Mr. Norton three years later: —

"I like London, and have learned to see as I never saw before the advantages of a great capital. It establishes one set of weights and measures, moral and intellectual, for the whole country. It is, I think, a great drawback for us that we have as many as we have states. The flow of life in the streets, too — sublimer it seems to me often than the tides of the sea — gives me a kind of stimulus that I find agreeable even if it prompt to nothing. For I am growing old, dear Charles, and have n't the go in me I once had. Then I have only to walk a hundred yards from my door to be in Hyde Park where, and in Kensington Gardens, I can tread on green turf and hear thrushes sing all winter. I often think of what you said to me about the birds here.

There *are* a great many more, and they sing more perennially than ours. As for the climate, it suits me better than any I have ever lived in, and for the inward weather, I have never seen civilization at so high a level in some respects as here."[1]

The remark at the close of the passage above about the "inward weather" of London hints at that prodigious social success of Lowell in London which it is now a little hard to appreciate. As we reconstruct it from the scattered records, it becomes a singularly illuminative and significant phenomenon. Mrs. Lowell's ill health made it impossible for the Lowells to entertain in their ministerial capacity; so that Lowell was free to accept without the burden of return all the multitudinous invitations that came to him. He went everywhere in London — in literary, in official, and in fashionable society. And as Mr. Smalley has said, probably no American ever saw the inside of so many English country-houses as Lowell.

At first he seems to have been a little shy and stiff in "society." Mr. Watts-Dunton, who went one time early in Lowell's London life to invite him to lunch to meet an eminent man of letters, noting a certain hesitation, said: "I am afraid that the American Minister who has jostled most

[1] *Letters*, vol. iii, p. 105.

of the grandees in Europe feels shy." "I *do*," replied Lowell, "but never with grandees."

Something of this shyness doubtless came from his feeling that his Americanism was a little on the defensive. He had written in 1879: "We are vulgar now precisely because we are afraid of being so. The English press is provincializing us again." And during his first months in England Lowell's resolution that he would not be provincialized seems at times to have made him a little awkward, but as time went on this passed into a kind of sweet ironic pleasantry. Mr. Smalley has preserved some curious illustrative anecdotes. "Hawthorne insulted us all," observed an English woman, "by saying all English women were fat; but I dare not say in Mr. Lowell's presence that an American woman is thin," — and in an address to the master and fellows of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he said rather saucily, "I must allow that, considering how long we have been divided from you, you speak English remarkably well."

Mr. Henry James, writing from the insular point of view, discovered a certain ostentation in Lowell's exhibition of national consciousness as if he spoke for a nation oppressed and in servitude; but, after the slight constraint of his first months was past, this was certainly no more than his instinctive wish to justify the America

that he loved in the sight of England, for whose mellow mood he had, even in his most anti-insular seasons, a profound and vital respect.

However that may be, it is certain that even in Lowell's occasional mocking at things English, English men and women found a charming piquancy; and few that met him failed to yield wholly to his gracious wisdom and airy wit. Indeed, he seems to have attracted Englishmen all the more powerfully in that with all the culture of their best he possessed a certain readiness and resiliency of mind which they themselves sometimes lacked.

For a poet his satisfactions were of the solidest. Once at a house party he came upon John Bright reading aloud from the "Commemoration Ode" to a group of intent listeners. "It sounded better than I feared," Lowell noted. And Trevelyan told him that he could never have carried through the abolition of purchase in the British army but for the inspiration and reinforcement he had drawn from the same poem.

The public honors which were thrust upon Lowell were as numerous and notable as his private successes. The list of honorary public offices which he held in English institutions is a long one. He was even asked to accept the Lord Rectorship of the University of St. Andrews — a

proposal which was received with great enthusiasm by the students and faculty of that institution. There was, however, some concerted opposition to this on the ground that Lowell was an alien, and an animated public controversy ensued, not the least striking result of which were the verses which appeared in "Punch," beginning,

"An alien? Go to! if fresh genial wit
In sound Saxon speech be not genuine grit,
If the wisdom and mirth he has put in verse for us
Don't make him a 'native,' why so much the worse for us."

In the end Lowell wisely withdrew his name, though with a whimsical regret that the cabalistic symbols, Univ. Sanct. Andr. Scot. Dom. Rect., could never appear after his name in the Harvard Quinquennial Catalogue. He wrote about it to Professor Child: —

"I have no news except that my official extraterritoriality will, perhaps, prevent my being rector of St. Andrews, because it puts me beyond the reach of the Scottish Courts in case of malversation in office. How to rob a Scottish University suggests a serious problem. I was pleased with the election and the pleasant way it was spoken of here, though I did not want the place. Had I known what I know now, I should not have allowed myself to be put up, but I was

in Paris, and had forgotten among the bookstalls that I was an Excellency." [1]

Lowell always took his English honors and successes, both public and private, with a certain humorous pleased humility. In 1884 he wrote to Mrs. W. K. Clifford, one of the closest of his English friends: —

"Could I have been such an ass as to ask if I was charming? It is out of the question. Even if I thought I was, I should be too clever to inquire too nicely about it, for I hold with my favorite Donne that 'who knows his virtue's name and place hath none.' And yet I have inferred from your letter that I have been stupid enough to ask something of the kind. Nothing in my life has ever puzzled me so much as my popularity here in England — which I have done nothing and been nothing to deserve. I was telling my wife a day or two ago that I could n't understand it. It must be my luck, and ought to terrify me, like the ring of Polycrates." [2]

If the course of Lowell's official career in England was not quite so extraordinary as his social, it was none the less marked by admirable diplomacy. When he had been there a little more than a year, President Garfield was shot

[1] *Letters*, vol. iii, pp. 110, 111.
[2] *Letters*, vol. iii, p. 118.

by Guiteau; and in the anxious period that intervened before Garfield's death, Lowell performed the delicate office of mediating the sympathy and sorrow of two great countries with very perfect tact. After the President's death, Lowell, finding himself quite worn out with the anxieties of the past weeks, took a brief vacation trip on the Continent, visiting Paris, Dresden, Weimar, Venice, and Rome.

Before setting out on his vacation, Lowell had sent to Mr. Gilder, editor of the "Century," his charming poem, "Phœbe," the first which he had written since the sonnet composed on the death of the young Spanish queen. In the week after mailing it, he followed it with five separate letters of rather fidgety emendation, showing curiously the growth in him of a delicate artistic sense, along with some decrease in his old confidence in his vein. It seems clear, however, that the geniality of his London life had quickened his poetic impulse again; and he might have gone on after his return from the Continent to write more frequent verse had it not been for the sudden recrudescence of the trouble over certain Irish-American citizens which had begun some months before. This caused Lowell endless work and worry, so that during the English stay he wrote no other verse than some graceful personal poems.

The Irish troubles were the most intricate and annoying that Lowell as a diplomatist had to face. It will be remembered that certain Irish Nationalists, after having attained American citizenship during a brief stay in the United States, returned to Ireland, became involved in the Nationalist agitation then rife, and were put in jail by the English authorities. There was at once a strong concerted action among Irish-Americans in the United States to secure their release, and a great deal of furious speech-making in Congress and elsewhere. Lowell seems to have conducted the matter with Lord Granville very astutely and firmly, though too discreetly to find much favor with agitated Irishmen in the United States. The difficulty of his situation is amply set forth in a letter to Holmes written after the worst of the trouble was over: —

"I made no distinction between naturalized and native and should have treated you as I did the 'suspects' — had there been as good ground. There is a manifest distinction, however, between a native American who goes abroad and a naturalized citizen who goes back to the country of his birth, and we acknowledge it in our treaties — notably with Germany — making two years' residence in the native country a forfeiture of the acquired citizenship. Some of my Irishmen had been in their old homes seventeen years, en-

gaged in trade or editing Nationalist papers or members of the Poor-law Guardians (like MacSweeney) and neither paying taxes in America nor doing any other duty as Americans. I was guided by two things — the recognized principles of international law, and the conduct of Lord Lyons when Seward was arresting and imprisoning British subjects. We kept one man in jail seven months without trial or legal process of any kind, and, but for the considerateness and moderation of Lyons, might have had war with England. I think I saved a misunderstanding here. . . . When I had at last procured the conditional (really unconditional) release of all the suspects, they refused to be liberated. When I spoke of this to Justin McCarthy (then the head of the Irish Parliamentary party, Parnell being in Kilmainham), he answered cheerfully, 'Certainly: *they are there to make trouble.*'"[1]

The negotiations were watched with the deepest interest on both sides of the water. At first much dissatisfaction was caused in America by Lowell's moderate and cautious action, and the papers were full of allusions to "that distinguished Englishman, J. R. Lowell." Lowell felt this keenly, as may be seen from a sentence in a letter to Mr. Aldrich written in May, 1882:

[1] *Letters*, vol. iii, pp. 128, 129.

"No, you must wait till I come home to be boycotted in my birthplace by my Irish fellow-citizens (who are kind enough to teach me how to be an American) who fought all our battles and got up all our draft riots." However, the papers of the better class were with him both in America and in England. After Lowell's death there was a notable memorial article in "The Spectator," in which the writer, who seems to have been privy to some of the conferences, affirmed that while Lowell possessed equally with Lord Granville the *suaviter in modo*, he was even more capable of conveying the impression of *fortiter in re*. A less spectacular but no less important affair of Lowell's diplomacy in England was the settlement of many claims involving millions of dollars and international considerations of the most far-reaching kind. Through their mutual appreciation and common good sense, which brought about a sincere friendship between Lowell and Lord Granville, matters which might have given trouble were easily and amicably settled.

It is worth remarking that despite his annoyance over some phases of the protracted Irish difficulty, Lowell was never without sympathy for the Nationalist movement, and he was a believer in home rule, which, as he said, "will make Conservatives every mother's son of them."

But more tangible than the diplomatic effectiveness of Lowell's personal popularity, and richer than his actual official activity, was that great career as a speech-maker which was, as we look back to it, the most striking phenomenon of his English mission.

He had, as we have seen, always enjoyed the act of public speaking, provided the circumstances were not those of a set oration before too vast an audience; and at the meetings of the Saturday Club, and in his class-room at Harvard, he had been undergoing for thirty years the best possible preparation for the kind of speeches which he was now called upon to make. For four years he was universally recognized as the most brilliant after-dinner orator in England; and he was the most sought after to deliver addresses at the unveiling of memorial tablets, and on other similar occasions.

In reading those of his speeches which were afterwards revised and incorporated in his collected works, and still more in reading the newspaper reports of his off-hand addresses, it is not hard to understand their remarkable prestige. In the first years of his stay in England, Lowell's speaking was of the first spontaneity and spirit. "There was a time," he writes some years later, "when I went to make a speech with a light heart, and when on my way to a dinner I could think

over my exordium in my cab and trust to the spur of the moment for the rest of my speech." How effective the spur of the moment was may be seen from the reports in the English press, where the page is peppered with "(*Laughter and cheers*)." No public speaker was ever more resourceful and adroit in humorous literary allusion. For example, in a speech at the dinner of the Literary Fund on a nipping, blusterous night in May, he began by reciting with prayerful irony that passage in Thomson's "Seasons," beginning, —

> "Come, gentle spring, ethereal mildness, come."

But the complete success of the speeches was due to other qualities than their external brilliancy and happy ease. The more important ones were written with the utmost care, and they were full of a mellow, ripened literary art and poetic idealism which gave an earnest burden to their wit. They were, in short, as Mr. Henry James has said finely, "the *revanche* of letters."

By far the greatest of Lowell's English speeches was the address on "Democracy," which he delivered as the inaugural on assuming the presidency of the Birmingham and Midland Institute at Birmingham. He attempted no such flights of oratory, no such passionate periods, as those that Beecher had flung at his Liverpool

audience twenty years before; but he did present the eternal ideals of democracy with a lucidity, a suggestiveness, and a secure conviction that gave to his utterances the accent of finality. None other of his political writings is so full of happy flashes of political insight. How suggestive, for example, is this passing definition: "England, indeed, may be called a monarchy with democratic tendencies, the United States a democracy with conservative instincts," or, as he goes on to say, "People are continually saying that America is in the air, and I am glad to think it is, since this means only that a clearer conception of human claims and human duties is beginning to be prevalent." It is hard to say what could have been in the minds of Lowell's numerous American critics, who persisted in accusing him bitterly of Anglomania and an easy apostasy from democratic principles in the face of such a peroration as this: —

"Let us be of good cheer, however, remembering that the misfortunes hardest to bear are those which never come. The world has outlived much, and will outlive a great deal more, and men have contrived to be happy in it. It has shown the strength of its constitution in nothing more than in surviving the quack medicines it has tried. In the scales of the destinies, brawn will never weigh so much as brain. Our healing

is not in the storm or in the whirlwind, it is not in monarchies, or aristocracies, or democracies, but will be revealed by the still, small voice that speaks to the conscience and the heart, prompting us to a wider and wiser humanity."

After the death of President Garfield and the accession of Vice-President Arthur to the presidential chair, there was the usual talk of a change in the diplomatic appointments, and Lowell was uncertain for a time whether he was to be kept at London. As Mr. Howells had had the pleasure of notifying Lowell of his first appointment to a diplomatic mission, so another of his liegemen, Mr. R. W. Gilder, had the pleasure of informing him officially from Mr. Frelinghuysen that he was to be retained in his post. But as the election of 1884 approached, Lowell could not fail to be aware that whichever way it might go his chance of remaining in England was slight. He had always been a vigorous opponent of Mr. Blaine and the Blaine faction in the Republican party: and despite his independence of party bonds and his personal admiration for Mr. Cleveland, he could scarcely hope to be retained in office by a Democratic President. So by the summer of 1884 he had begun to think of his return home.

Any regret that he may have felt at this was

forgotten in the overwhelming blow which came to him on the 19th of February, 1885, when Mrs. Lowell, who had been in uncertain health since her desperate attack of typhoid in Madrid five years before, died after a brief illness. He wrote to Mr. George Putnam two weeks later: "I am more than ever at a loss what to do with myself. We had always taken it for granted that she would outlive me — that would have been best. But I cannot live alone in the old home. It would be too dreary;" — and a fortnight later to Mrs. Clifford: "In trying to piece together the broken threads of my life again, the brightest naturally catch the eye first. I write only to say that I do not forget. I am getting on as one does — gradually getting my wits together. . . . I have at last found something I can read — Calderon — he has stood me in stead before." And again, a month later, he wrote to Mr. Norton, "My future is misty to me."

As soon as the news of Mr. Phelps's appointment as Lowell's successor reached England, a strong concerted movement was started to induce him to remain in that country. He was even sounded as to his willingness to accept a Professorship of English Language and Literature at Oxford, and had he consented to stand the post would have been his. But he was tired,

and longed for home. So, in June, 1885, he was back in America, established for a time at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Burnett, in Southborough, Massachusetts, whence he went in the summer to Washington, "carrying his head," as he wrote to Mr. Gilder, "as Bertran de Born did, like a lantern," to take a look at his decapitators.

The sum of Lowell's diplomatic service in England is perhaps seen best from the English point of view. The fullest estimate of it is to be gained from the memorial articles which appeared in the English press after his death in 1891. His personal success was recorded on every hand. "We could not have been prouder of him had he been one of us," says one writer; "His mind," says another, "was at once fine and sagacious, idealistic and practical, humorous and businesslike, witty and sober. . . . With all his grace there was a plainness of purpose that could not be mistaken." The Queen is recorded to have said that during her long reign no ambassador or minister had created so much interest and won so much regard as Mr. Lowell. And it is important to note that his personal popularity stretched through all circles of English society. Just as he was leaving for America a "numerous deputation" of the Workmen's Peace Society waited upon him and presented him with some

more than commonly warm resolutions engrossed on vellum. Mr. Watts-Dunton, writing in the "Athenæum," said: "Fine as is the written work of Lowell, his unwritten work is finer still;" and he points out the curious fact that not only did he establish a new rapport between England and America, but also brought into being a relation hitherto undreamed of between the literary and official sets in England itself.

Yet, after all, the chief business of an American minister is not the admirable promotion of brotherly love between the writers and the statesmen of the country to which he is accredited; nor even, as is coming to be thought, to act as the business agent of his country's commerce. It is rather to stand not only as the spokesman but as the type and protagonist of his people, to embody and exhibit without undue violence of emphasis the national virtues and graces, to win the way of his people in international affairs by the arts of friendship. This Lowell did pre-eminently.

CHAPTER VI

LAST YEARS

1886–1891

From the time of Lowell's return to America in 1885 and his establishment at Deerfoot Farm, Southborough, the shadows of the fifth act begin to darken in his letters. There is a good deal of the mood of *ainsi va le monde*, and reflections upon death are not infrequent. The general tone of his correspondence is, nevertheless, indomitably cheerful. After his return to America he took up letter-writing as his chief occupation, finding, as he humorously complains, "a bushel of cold letters" waiting for him after each brief absence from home. So his letters of this last period, with their sunny texture shot with darker strands, afford, perhaps, a more full and expressive picture of his mind than those of any other period of his life.

He found his situation at Southborough for a time at least almost wholly to his taste. ". . . I am already," he writes, "in love with Southborough, which is a charmingly unadulterated New England village and with as lovely land-

scapes as I ever saw. I intrench myself in a flannel shirt and wander over the hills and in the lonely pastures, rejoicing in the immitigable sunshine. 'T is an odd shift in the peep hole of my panorama from London to this Chartreuse. For the present I like it, and find it wholesome. I fancy myself happy sometimes — I am not sure — but then I never was for long." [1]

He spent the winter of 1885 and 1886 chiefly at Southborough, though he was for some weeks of it in Boston with his sister, Mrs. Putnam, whose house was always for him in his latter days an alternate home.

In this year and the following one, Lowell made many addresses in various parts of the country, chiefly upon literature, with an occasional aside on politics. And in the winter of 1885–86, acting in his capacity of professor emeritus at Harvard, he read Dante for some weeks in the second term with a few boys.

In April he sailed for England to spend the summer. This summer seems not to have been so satisfactory to him as some of those which followed, for the address which he had promised to make at the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Harvard in the fall weighed on his mind, and his sadder memories of London were still fresh. He writes with keen interest of Gladstone

[1] *Letters*, vol. iii, pp. 135, 136.

and the Home Rule crusade, but the general burden of his letters for the summer is of an elegiac sentiment. He writes to Mr. Norton: "Sometimes I hear faintly the notes of S——'s violin singing 'Scheiden, ach Scheiden!' and think of many things."

He was back at Deerfoot Farm in October, where he was subjected to a peculiarly keen annoyance, when the son of an old friend drew him out to some characteristic expressions of his hearty likes and dislikes, and afterwards printed the whole conversation, somewhat idealized, in a New York paper. In November he delivered his address at Harvard — a ripe plea for the study of those humanities to which his own life had been given up. It was thought by some that he hardly did justice to the advantages of the elective system, and for some weeks afterward he was engaged in correspondence with various persons concerning his views on this matter.

In the spring of 1887, with a curiously dramatic reversion, he again lectured upon the old dramatists before the Lowell Institute of Boston. He was also busier with his writing than he had been for many years before. In 1887 he published two poems in the "Atlantic," and also wrote an introduction to a bi-voluminous work entitled "The World's Progress," published by

Gately and O'Gorman of Boston. In the spring of 1887 he went again to England, where he seems to have had a rather better summer than the preceding one. As he wrote to his daughter, Mrs. Burnett, with whom his correspondence was always of an intellectual comradeship not very common, perhaps, between fathers and their daughters: —

"I can hardly help laughing sometimes when I think how a single step from my hermitage takes me into Babylon. Meanwhile it amuses and interests me. My own vitality seems to reinforce itself as if by some unconscious transfusion of the blood from these ever-throbbing arteries of life into my own. Upon my word, I think I am beginning in my old age to find a more impressive and poignant solitude in the Great City than in the country. I get all the country I want in the park, which is within five minutes of me, and the song of the thrush is more pathetic there, like a quotation of poetry in a dreary page of prose."[1]

After a round of friendly visits, including a stay of some weeks in his well-beloved Whitby, Lowell returned to Southborough in the fall of 1887 and devoted himself for some time to the preparation of a volume of poems which was published with the title "Heartsease and Rue"

[1] *Letters*, vol. iii, p. 187.

in the spring of 1888. Most of the pieces in it were old, some having been printed in the magazines twenty years before and passed by in "Under the Willows," his last previous collection; but some were written at the time the volume was in preparation. One of the most interesting of these to the student of Lowell's poetic development is the "Endymion," a curiously Shelleyan and mystical piece for a poet of near threescore years and ten to write. Two letters concerning it, written by Lowell to Mr. F. J. Garrison for the publishers, are of sufficient interest to print here. They show the significant persistence of his sense of inspiration, with a growing punctiliousness in revision: —

DEERFOOT FARM, 20th December, 1887.

DEAR MR. GARRISON, — I hoped to have sent this ["Endymion"] by Monday morning's post, but for two days after my return my head continued to be cloggy and my vein would n't flow. I have at last managed to give what seems to me as much consecutiveness as they need to what have been a heap of fragments in my notebooks for years. Longer revolution in my head might round it better, but take it as a meteorolite, splintery still but with some metallic iridescence here and there brought from some volcanic star. Let it come among the poems of

sentiment, and, as the longest, first if possible. I suppose it is too late for use in the Atlantic? . . .

Faithfully yours,

J. R. Lowell.

Deerfoot Farm, 5th January, 1887 [*sic*].

Dear Mr. Garrison, — I hope the pages with black lines round them are not yet cast. In the "Endymion" I miss some verses which I omitted and want them back again. There is nothing like the first "lively running" after all.

In the "Nest" the first running of one of the lines was not lively. I never liked "haggling" — 't is a harsh and peddlerish word. But in my then hurry I could hit on no other. It has come to me now. "Pleading" is softer and what I wanted. But this necessitates the change in the previous verse to avoid the assonance of "plead" and "repeat."

I must bother you a little in this way, for I like things as good as I can make them, far short, as they always are, of what one wishes them to be.

Faithfully yours,

J. R. Lowell.

Early in 1888 a committee of the senior class of Harvard College forwarded to Lowell a letter

bearing the signature of some five hundred undergraduates, begging him to deliver a course of lectures upon the English Poets of the Nineteenth Century. Lowell's fine letter in reply may fitly be printed here. It was his valediction to the old academic pursuits, and it shows amply how much his teaching had meant to him, despite the whimsical weariness wherewith he habitually spoke of it.

DEERFOOT FARM, 7th January, 1888.

To Messrs. James Loeb, Rupert Norton, Herbert D. Hale, Lloyd McKim Garrison, Charles Allen Porter, and many others.

GENTLEMEN AND MY VERY KIND FRIENDS, — I feel not only honored but deeply moved by the letter you have been good enough to write me. During my long service in the University my relations with the students were always agreeable, not seldom fruitful, to me, and, in some good measure, I trust, to my pupils also. But in all my experience as a teacher, nothing ever gave me such pleasure as your friendly words. The proverb tells us that "he who plants pears plants for his heirs." I seem to myself (and it is no small gratification to an old man) to be tasting fruit from a tree of my own setting as I read what you say to me. I shall treasure your letter with its long list of signatures as the most

precious collection of autographs I could leave to my descendants. No doubt many of the names will one day have the same price in the eyes of the world, as now in mine, but they can never suffuse them so pleasantly. I look on this document as a kind of quittance from my Past.

But I must take leave to regard it as a *nunc dimittis* too.

It is very hard to say *no* to such an appeal, and it costs me a struggle to say it. I can scarce find in my vocabulary a negative soft enough and hesitating enough for the occasion. Were I living in Cambridge, I should search in vain for any such. But so far away as I am, at my great age too (who am on the edge of my seventieth year) and with the many duties that just now demand my instant and exclusive thought — for it is high time I should be putting my house in order — I feel that I am warranted in denying a petition which, under other circumstances, I should receive as a command, and in declining a duty to which, at least, I could give but half of even what strength is left me.

Begging you to accept my hearty thanks, since I can give no more, I remain,

Very sincerely,
Your friend and fellow student,
J. R. Lowell.

Just after the publication of "Heartsease and Rue" Lowell printed in the "Atlantic" his remarkable poem on "Turner's Old Téméraire: under a figure symbolizing the Church;" and on the 13th of April in the same year he delivered before the Reform Club of New York an address upon "The Place of the Independent in Politics."

We have seen throughout the story of Lowell's life how high was the ideality which he carried into politics, and how restive he had always been under strict party bonds. Only during the years of the war, when the young Republican party was still of an idealist temper, was he ever completely in harmony with the mood of one of the great American political factions. As Minister to Spain and to England, he always refused, as he said, to have any politics, considering himself to represent the country, and no special party in it. After his return from England his political mood was far from buoyant. Like nearly all Anglo-Saxon poets who have not died young, his personal temper was increasingly conservative; yet clear-sighted as he was and impatient of formulations, it was impossible for him to rest, like most conservatives, in an allegiance to a party. Indeed he had for many years an earnest hope that through the rise of a large and fearless body of independent voters a permanent third

party might be established, so that the country might divide upon rational and permanent issues, like the tariff and the currency. This alignment was now taking place in the two great parties, and it was easy to foretell where Lowell's sympathy would lie. His chief patriotic wish for a decade had been that, by the establishment of a sound civil service, politics might be made an honorable and attractive profession for the best minds. It naturally came about that he was increasingly at odds with the leaders in his old party, that he had a growing admiration and regard for Mr. Cleveland, and that in his speeches he expressed very fully and forcibly the mood of the more independent wing of the Democrats. His political speeches never ceased to partake of his old political idealism — of the mood of "The Present Crisis" and of the "Commemoration Ode," — though they were freighted with the sagacity of a man who had been a constant reader of history, and who had shrewdly observed the operation of many governments. How dynamic this was, is apparent in the close of the speech on tariff reform, which he delivered before the Tariff Reform League in Boston, December 29, 1887: —

"Many of us remember, as they remember nothing else, the overwhelming rush of that great national passion, obliterating all lines of party

division and leveling all the landmarks of habitual politics. Who that saw it will ever forget that enthusiasm of loyalty for the flag and for what the flag symbolized which twenty-six years ago swept all the country's forces of thought and sentiment, of memory and hope, into the grasp of its overmastering torrent? Martial patriotism touches the heart, kindles the imagination, and rouses the nobler energies of men as nothing else ever does or can. Even love is a paler emotion. That image of our Country with the flame of battle in her eyes which every man then saw, how beautiful it was, how potent to inspire devotion! But these ecstasies of emotion are by their very nature as transient as they are ennobling. There is a sedater kind of patriotism, less picturesque, less inspiring, but quite as admirably serviceable in the prosy days of peace. It is the patient patriotism which strives to enlighten public opinion and to redress the balance of party spirit, which inculcates civic courage and independence of mind, which refuses to accept clamor as argument, or to believe that phrases become syllogisms by repetition. It is this more modest and thoughtful patriotism to the exemplifying and practice of which we aspire, and the first lesson it teaches us is that a moderated and controlled enthusiasm is, like stored electricity, the most powerful of motive

forces, and that the reformer of practical abuses, springing from economic ignorance or mistake, then first begins to be wise when he allows for the obstinate vitality of human error and human folly, and is willing to believe that those who cannot see as he does are not therefore necessarily bad men."

This is the final answer to those who reproached Lowell with lukewarm Americanism; he was too wise a man to be blind to the faults of his country; but he was too true a man not to know, with Bacon, that the faults of one's country, like those of his natural parents, should be dealt with by kindly leading, not by contestation and reproach.

Lowell's religious belief at the end of his life was of a piece with his political, — doubt subdued by hope but not killed. Despite the warm friendship of his middle age with men of science, the doctrines that were advanced by Darwin and his followers had always repelled him — perhaps because with that affinity of certain of his moods for pessimism which we have noticed, he perceived the temperamental danger for him of evolutionary doctrines. He had written to Leslie Stephen in 1876: —

"I continue to shut my eyes resolutely in certain speculative directions, and am willing to

find solace in certain intimations that seem to me from a region higher than my reason;" — and to Miss Grace Norton in 1879 he wrote of science: "I hate it as a savage does writing, because I fear it will hurt me somehow;" and he goes on to say: —

"I think the evolutionists will have to make a fetich of their protoplasm before long. Such a mush seems to me a poor substitute for the Rock of Ages, by which I understand a certain set of higher instincts which mankind have found solid under their feet in all weathers."

On the other hand, it was impossible for Lowell to find solace and support in the doctrine of any church. "All religious formulations," says Mr. Howells, "bored him," — and in his last years he replied to the question "Is there a moral government in the universe?" gravely and with a kind of pain, "The scale is so vast, and we see such a little part of it."

In short, despite the seeming self-deception in the letter to Stephen, half of Lowell at heart was a man

> "To bear all naked truths,
> And to envisage circumstance all calm."

As time went on he contrived to make some kind of a working reconciliation between his clear-eyed perception of facts and his poet's sense of invisible realities. In his essay on "The Progress of

the World," he contrived to present the scientific view of the world hopefully: —

"The imagination grows giddy," he says, "as it looks down along the rounds of the ladder lost, save a short stretch of it, in distance below, by which life has climbed from the zoöphyte to Plato to Newton, to Michael Angelo, to Shakespeare."

Yet he goes on to say of science in a passage of full cadenced prose, which has something of the accent, if little of the doctrine, of Parson Wilbur:

"And who shall reproach her with having put far away from us the homely and neighborly heaven of unlettered faith, when she has opened such a playground for the outings of speculation, and noted in her guide-book so many spacious inns for the refreshment of the disembodied spirit on its travels, so many and so wondrous *magnalia* for its curiosity and instruction? To me it seems not unreasonable to find a reinforcement of optimism, a renewal of courage and hope, in the modern theory that man has mounted to what he is from the lowest step of potentiality, through toilsome grades of ever expanding existence, even though it have been by a spiral stairway, mainly dark or dusty, with loop-holes at long intervals only, and these granting but a narrow and one-sided view."

Thus, for all the human sorrow with which Lowell sees a dismantled church dragged away,

like the old Téméraire, by the tug of science, to a forlorn anchorage, he does contrive to absorb the results of science into his mood of larger idealism and keep a faithful heart. In the long run, it was the poetry of life that was to Lowell the chief incentive to faith; for him the infinite wonder of the world as it was presented to his sensitive spirit held a certitude and a promise. His last word upon it is in the epilogue to his lectures upon the old dramatists, which fitly stands at the end of his collected works: —

"I cannot bid you farewell without thanking you for the patience with which you have followed me to the end. I may have seemed sometimes to be talking to you of things that would weigh but as thistle-down in the great business-scales of life. But I have an old opinion, strengthening with years, that it is as important to keep the soul alive as the body: nay, that it is the life of the soul which gives all its value to that of the body. Poetry is a criticism of life only in the sense that it furnishes us with the standard of a more ideal felicity, of calmer pleasures and more majestic pains. I am glad to see that what the understanding would stigmatize as useless is coming back into books written for children, which at one time threatened to become more and more drearily practical and didactic. The fairies are permitted once more to imprint

their rings on the tender sward of the child's fancy, and it is the child's fancy that often lives obscurely on to minister solace to the lonelier and less sociable mind of the man. Our nature resents the closing up of the windows on its emotional and imaginative side, and revenges itself as it can. I have observed that many who deny the inspiration of Scripture hasten to redress their balance by giving a reverent credit to the revelations of inspired tables and camp-stools. In a last analysis it may be said that it is to the sense of Wonder that all literature of the Fancy and of the Imagination appeals. I am told that this sense is the survival in us of some savage ancestor of the age of flint. If so, I am thankful to him for his longevity, or his transmitted nature, whichever it may be. But I have my own suspicion sometimes that the true age of flint is before, and not behind us, an age hardening itself more and more to those subtle influences which ransom our lives from the captivity of the actual, from that dungeon whose warder is the Giant Despair. Yet I am consoled by thinking that the siege of Troy will be remembered when those of Vicksburg and Paris are forgotten. One of the old dramatists, Thomas Heywood, has, without meaning it, set down for us the uses of the poets: —

> 'They cover us with counsel to defend us
> From storms without; they polish us within

With learning, knowledge, arts, and disciplines;
All that is nought and vicious they sweep from us
Like dust and cobwebs; our rooms concealed
Hang with the costliest hangings 'bout the walls,
Emblems and beauteous symbols pictured round.' "

In the summer of 1888, Lowell was again in England for the third time since his return from his English mission. As usual, a good part of the time was spent in his familiar lodgings at Whitby. Here he lived in great content in a little suite of rooms in the house of the Misses Galilee, by whom, according to a writer in the Contributors' Club of the "Atlantic Monthly," he was long remembered as the kindest and most considerate of guests. "You could see that he was a great man," they said. Yet their recollection of his talk shows that it was often melancholy, with many an allusion to age and feebleness. Indeed, from this time onward, save for a few brief seasons of relief, Lowell was a prey to very serious ill health. For thirty years he had been occasionally troubled with the gout. So early as 1858 we find him humorously complaining that he has the gout so that he "can't go out," and lamenting his *in-great-toe otio ;* but as we have seen, the affliction was not very serious until the two years of his stay in Europe in 1872 and 1873. Thence onward the attacks grew more frequent and severe, until in 1888 this con-

stitutional malady gave way to the cancerous growth which was to cause his death.

Nevertheless, despite his ill health and hours of loneliness, the sadness that occasionally appears in his letters is almost always merged in some passage now of cheerful humor, now of pure fun. It would be hard to find a more shining instance of the persistent continuity of temperament. The Lowell who, more than half a century before, had been able to find in humor a relief from what seemed then a tragic disappointment in love; who by its aid weathered his years of storm and stress and became successively the chief wit of the Band, the author of the "Fable for Critics," of the "Biglow Papers," and of thousands of gay letters, was the same Lowell who now, at the end, still made shift to look at the world humorously and bravely. The eternal boy, which is so durable a strain in the temperament of genius, was as exuberant in Lowell in these last days as he had ever been in the years of his actual boyhood; though there is a certain lurking pathos in his expression that is not of youth. He wrote at the end of a letter to two young English friends in the fall of 1890:—

"If you ever see me again within any reasonable time, you will be shyer of me, I am grown

so young. You won't be able to treat me as if I were shelved among the old 70's any more. But I will try to be as old as I can. . . . Good-bye.

"Affectionately yours,

"GIACOPO IL RINGIOVENUTO."

After his return from England in the fall of 1888 Lowell busied himself with some miscellaneous writing, the preparation and delivery of several addresses, and a great deal of reading. In February he made a visit to Washington, where his son-in-law, Mr. Edward Burnett, was a member of Congress. He found the brief return to official society rather amusing, and renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Cleveland, much to his satisfaction.

On the 30th of April he delivered an address upon "Our Literature" at the celebration in New York of the one hundredth anniversary of Washington's inaugural. This, another of his valedictions, shows a vast ripening, but little other change from the position he had taken in that introductory editorial to "The Pioneer" forty-five years before. It is still a *natural*, rather than a provincially *national*, literature for which he pleads, yet he concludes in a strain of hopeful but collected prophecy: —

"The literature of a people should be the record of its joys and sorrows, its aspirations and

its shortcomings, its wisdom and its folly, the confidant of its soul. We cannot say that our own as yet suffices us, but I believe that he who stands a hundred years hence where I am standing now, conscious that he speaks to the most powerful and prosperous community ever devised or developed by man, will speak of our literature with the assurance of one who beholds what we hope for and aspire after, become a reality and a possession forever."

In the spring of 1889 he wrote an essay upon Izaak Walton to serve as introduction to a new edition of "The Compleat Angler." The constant mellowing of his powers to the end is manifest in this essay. For form, proportion, harmony, and the measured accent that carries conviction, as well as for lively grace, the essay upon Walton is surely one of his finest. It is hard to withhold a "*tu quoque*" when he concludes with the happy line, —

"*Fortunate senex! ergo tua rura manebunt.*"

At the end of May, 1889, Lowell sailed for what was to be his last visit to England. As usual, the greater part of his stay was at Whitby, whence he wrote to Mrs. W. E. Darwin: —

"The charm of this place and the kind-heartedness of the weather have Capuaed me here longer than I meant.

"There is no use in trying to tell you how beautiful our moors have been — pensively gorgeous like the purple mourning that used to be worn for kings — as if they were still commemorating the lonely funerals of the chieftains whose barrows crown their summits. And our Abbey — did n't I see it a few nights ago with the moon shining through its windows till one fancied it lighted up for service with corpse-lights for candles, and heard the ghostly miserere of the monks over their ruins? And then its fantastic transformation by the sea-mists! Do you wonder that I linger?" [1]

When Lowell came back to America in the fall of 1889, it was to live once more at Elmwood, with his daughter, Mrs. Burnett, and her children as his housemates. "I watch the moon," he writes to Lady Lyttelton, "rise behind the same trees through which I first saw it seventy years ago and have a strange feeling of permanence, as if I should watch it seventy years longer."

He occupied himself in the winter of 1889 and 1890 in revising and preparing for the press the collected edition of his works in poetry and prose, which was published in ten volumes in 1890. He also did some reading in preparation for the life of Hawthorne which he had been asked to prepare for the American Men of Letters Series;

[1] *Letters*, vol. iii, pp. 249, 250.

but never went any further with it. He wrote some verses which were printed in the magazines; and he seems, indeed, to have been anxious for prudential reasons to write as much as possible. His profits at this time from the royalties on his books were only two thousand dollars a year, and his other income was not always quite adequate to his generous desires. In sending a group of poems to Mr. T. B. Aldrich, then editor of the "Atlantic," he wrote: —

ELMWOOD, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,
8th May, 1890.

DEAR ALDRICH, — If you think these things worthy a place in the "Atlantic," send me a hundred dollars and print 'em. If not, return 'em and I will find a market elsewhere. I must pay my doctor's bills. I was very near leaving 'em for my heirs to pay, which would have saved me money, but it was ordered that I should n't go yet. They are not potboilers, these things, though I now thrust them under the pot. The sonnet I have been carrying about in my head these six years and at last wrote it down to try whether my wits were damaged or no. Perhaps they are — you must judge. The Fielding I had forgotten and found written on the back of a letter. I wrote it when I unveiled the bust of F. at Taunton, but never offered it to the burghers of that town.

I am very well, I think, and loiter about my grounds a little, but Dr. Wyman insists that I shall be quiet, and especially that I shall not walk more than a quarter of a mile a day, which is prison rations for me. He was here just now and I thought he would raise his interdict, but he would n't.

Faithfully yours,

J. R. Lowell.

The ill health referred to at the close of this letter became graver and still graver. He had been very dangerously ill in the spring of 1890, and though he recovered, it was only to have relapse follow relapse until the end. He told Mr. Howells that he had gone to Beaver Brook and tried to jump from one stone to another in the stream but had to give it up, and he said, without completing his sentence, "If it has come to *that* with me!" —

It was, of course, out of the question for him to make his wonted trip to England in the summer; but he was in part compensated for this loss by a visit from Leslie Stephen, the closest of his English friends, who spent some weeks with him at Elmwood in the summer; and he occupied his mind in writing an introduction to Milton's "Areopagitica," published by the Grolier Club of New York. With a brief paper in the Con-

tributors' Club of the "Atlantic," this was his last prose.

Through the winter of 1890 and 1891 his health wavered, and he was able to go about but little and to do little serious reading. He read endless novels, however, in which he found a singular pleasure. As he wrote to Leslie Stephen, "I never read so many before, I think, in my life, and they come to me as fresh as the fairy tales of my boyhood." He helped his grandchildren, somewhat modestly, with their Greek, and played with his dogs. He wrote to Mrs. Stephen in February, 1891: —

"I wish you could see the dogs lying before my fire, each making a pillow of the other and looking around to me from time to time lest I should forget that they loved me. Human eyes have generally precious little soul in them, but with theirs there comes sometimes the longing for a soul and almost overtaking it that is desperately touching." This is the last of the numerous allusions in his letters to the canine succession of Argus, Bessie, Bram, Stoker, Pank, and Gobble. He had been all his life as true a dog-lover as Sir Walter Scott.

Perhaps the most vivid picture we have of him at the last is that written by a young Englishman, who, having known Lowell in his London days, had gone to see him at Elmwood in the

LOWELL AND SIR LESLIE STEPHEN IN THE STUDY AT ELMWOOD

spring of 1891. As Lowell, gray and ill, stood in the doorway of Elmwood, saying farewell, there came from over the way a strain of music which, as he said, he had last heard at a brilliant assembly in London. It gave him, as it seemed, a flashing memory of all his rich and various life, so pathetically near its end.

In the hot July of 1891 Lowell fell ill of the gravest attack of his malady that he had yet suffered. After some days a delirium came upon him, in which he fancied he was meeting royal personages and seemed continually imploring to be taken home to Elmwood. The delirium passed, but the end was near. On the 12th of August he died.

Lowell the Man.

Looking backward over the various life whose secret unity we have endeavored to recapture, two things should be plain: it was a true *vita vitalis* wherein action and dream played each its due part; and, after the fever of youth was over, the man who lived it ripened and mellowed consistently to the end. In one of those passages of his essay on Dante, where his humanist's witch-wand of sympathetic imagination pointed most sensitively to the springs of character, Lowell says that the Tuscan poet was shaped by "rank, ease, love, study, affairs, state-

craft, hope, exile, hunger, dependence, despair." Lowell himself knew all the more beneficent disciplines of this series, and, allowing for the softer conditions of modern life, he was not ignorant of their bitter brethren. His life was indeed marked by a certain propitious continuity; it held more of leisure than most men's; it had few tragic crises, few frustrations; yet beneath its seeming happy content black waters ran. He knew well the pain of human loss by death, and he knew another duller, more numbing pain, as, one after another, four members of his household suffered mental disease. So he was shaped into the wise, humorous, graciously human man still remembered by many as better than anything he ever wrote.

Yet, like all humanists, he was something of a problem to his lovers, to his critics, and to himself. In particular on the great question: Was he simple, or was he subtle? there are clashing voices. Mr. Henry James, with the habitual desire of a subtle man to find other seemingly subtle fellows simple, says: "He had no experimental sympathies, and no part of him was traitor to the rest. . . . Subtlety in his intelligence found expression in linguistics."

Mr. Howells, on the other hand, with his sensitive perception of temperament says: "His nature was not always serene or pellucid; it was

sometimes roiled by the currents that counter and cross in all of us: but it was without the least alloy of insincerity, and it was never darkened by the shadow of a selfish fear."

Lowell himself, with the partial knowledge of introspection, is constantly writing of warring impulses and tendencies in himself, captained now, as in his lyrical fairy tale "Uncle Cobus's Story," by "Fan-ta-si-a" (by which we may understand "the Spence negligence") and "Elbo-gres," now by the spirits of Hope and Despair. Yet Leslie Stephen — wisest of critics of essential character — has recorded that his chief impression of Lowell, after years of the closest intimacy, was "of his unvarying sweetness and simplicity . . . of unmixed kindliness and thorough wholesomeness of nature."

Viewing Lowell's life as a whole, the truth may perhaps be seen to occupy its customary medial position. Psychologically, with his visions and his recurrent disturbing sense of secondary personality, he was undoubtedly highly complex. So was he, also, temperamentally, with his conflicting inherited impulses toward idleness and action. He was complex and subtle in his intellect, with its vast variety of mental furniture, its odd irrelevancies, its unstable union of skepticism and faith. All these diverse qualities went to make up a "myriad-minded" humanist, who

had in his own phrase something of the "multanimous nature of the poet" and longed for many lives and many careers. Yet, air-spun as the distinction may seem, the complexity in Lowell was only in his psychology, temperament, intellect; his character was all the while simple and sincere.

This unity in variety which is the law of any sound and vital personality appears in all his traits. The one irreducible factor in his equation was an irrepressible whimsicality of a kind more often found in low-voltage men than in men of Lowell's grade of power. In part it was the mere ebullition of animal spirits, in part it was the froth that is blown from deep-tossing waters. Doubtless the attrition of an earnest New England environment upon "the Spence negligence" fostered it. But it is as idle to inquire further into its origins as to regret it. Lowell's boyish readiness to laugh at the wrong time certainly gave rise to blemishes in his poetry and in his prose, yet it was part and parcel of the mood that gave us the "Biglow Papers" and of the essence of his most delightful self. Lowell was not one of those shadowy whimsicalists in whom sentimentalizing whimsies slowly sap the foundations of character. Hence his irony was in the employ of optimism — not of pessimism. It consorted oddly with that rigid

Puritanism which no true-born New Englander wholly outgrows, but never disintegrated it.

Indeed, not in "Humanism" but in "Puritanism" do we find, after all, the secret unity of Lowell's character. Throughout his formal writing from first to last, as well as in his familiar letters, we never cease to feel under all his chameleon play of mood a solid core of character in which the deep sense of personal responsibility is the principle of life. In all his prose there is no more characteristic passage than that in his essay on Dante, where he says: —

"Very hateful to his fervid heart and sincere mind would have been the modern theory which deals with sin as involuntary error, and by shifting off the fault to the shoulders of Atavism or those of Society, personified for purposes of excuse, but escaping into impersonality again from the grasp of retribution, weakens that sense of responsibility which is the root of self-respect and the safeguard of character." Here, if I mistake not, is the very voice of the Puritan spirit.

But though these subtleties of temperament are closely related to certain contradictions in Lowell's printed work, they certainly were of little account to the people who knew and loved him as a man.

Barring certain occasional hauteurs not unbecoming in "the Marquis of Thompson's Lot," in whom many men were always conscious of an older and finer civilization than their own, and barring that active detestation of "Bores" in which his writings abound, Lowell was a thoroughly generous-minded and lovable man. His yearning for personal affection was expressed almost tremulously everywhere in his letters. They are full of phrases like "You must try to like me," "So long as you like *me*, I don't care how you like my work," and "I want you to like me," repeated and repeated again to both men and women. Nor do his correspondents appear to have been at all backward in responding to his wish. Throughout his life we find traces of the Platonic warmth of his friendship, and discover how in our so critical and quizzical age he preserved a certain young, transcendental ardor of affection, and was curiously unashamed of the frank expression of it. Up to middle life his friendships were chiefly with men. Like his own Fitz Adam he seems a little to have misliked woman,

> "Not from cross or whim,
> But that his mother shared too much in him."

From about his fiftieth year onward, however, as the more masculine side of his nature was developed by dealing with affairs, the most inti-

mate of his new friendships came by a natural paradox to be with high-bred, rich-natured women, in Spain, in England, and at home.

His sympathies never lost the true humanist's scope. From first to last he had a keen gust for "the gamy flavor of the bookless man," and was always eager for a chat with some salty sailorman or racy-tongued guide. Though when ostentatiously uncollared humanity appeared in Literature with a song of itself and the Cosmos, the Marquis of Thompson's Lot was pretty sure to dislike it.

People liked to be with Lowell not alone because of his charming talk; his person was as pleasing as his sensitive perceptions or his picturesque animation of phrase. He was five feet seven inches in height, a little inclined to be stout, but brisk and vigorous. His coloring was fresh and ruddy, with hair and beard of a bright reddish brown that never wholly faded into gray. His eyes, in their setting of kindly wrinkles, telling of humorous judgments and bookish days and nights, were of a clear blue-gray. They were described by a work-woman in the house of one of his friends as the "coaxinest eyes." His voice was of a pleasant tone and quality, and his manner of speech was always that of one who had a respect for his native tongue.

This was the man his friends knew and loved,

notwithstanding the slightly exaggerated manner that strangers sometimes misunderstood. With an almost lapidary concision, Holmes has expressed a friend's view of Lowell in a single stanza of his memorial poem: —

> "The singer whom we long have held so dear
> Was Nature's darling, shapely, strong, and fair, —
> Of keenest wit, of judgment crystal-clear,
> Easy of converse, courteous, debonair."

CHAPTER VII

LOWELL'S POETRY

In the chapters that have gone before, the writer's endeavor was to look at the world through Lowell's eyes, to see his work as his contemporaries saw it, to know the man as his friends knew him. But in this and the following chapter his affair is one of objective criticism. It is time now to consider Lowell's written work in the cool, undeceptive light of "*ce lendemain sévère*" — that dispassionate to-morrow in which whatever a man's work has of caducity or of vitality is seen for what it is.

Lowell was but five years old when Tennyson, aged fourteen, chiseled *Byron is Dead* upon a rock at Somersby, and "the whole world seemed darkened for him." Yet with that tardiness that long marked our literature, America, in the thirties, was the intellectual contemporary of England in the teens, and in much of his earliest poetry Lowell partook of the Byronic mood, a little colored by the related mood of Blair and Young, who still helped to sway cis-Atlantic

poetic taste. His undergraduate verse, in its satirical sallies, its easy world pain, its occupation with nocturnal mystery and melancholy, held a Byronism that was symptomatic of the author's time and place even more than of his own youthful predicament. Yet in his first volume, printed in 1841, Byronism is not conspicuous. Transcendentalism is now his motive, and Spenser, his early love, is the poet from whom his imagery mostly derives, though occasional echoes of Tennyson, Keats, Wordsworth, Landor, and the Jacobeans begin to be heard. In the 1844 volume the old writers are more and the moderns less in evidence. Thence onward, as his poetry became more and more "a definite faculty" instead of "a boundless sense of power," it became the more self-expressive; it was, in a sense, increasingly bookish, yet decreasingly imitative.

One of the most constant and characteristic qualities of the verse in the two volumes published in 1841 and 1844, and in his pieces in periodicals within those years, was a certain weirdness, amounting at times to extravagance, of imagery. The *macabre*, the supernatural, the fantastic, "a Mermaid's green eyelash," — these were the things his imagination ran riot with, and doubtless they were the images found poetic by his early readers. Yet for a reader to-day they possess no illusion. They open no vistas of perilous

seas, and the veritable horns of elfland are not heard in them. Yet in these two volumes there were a few poems that are still memorable. These were mainly of two classes, — the sincere and fervent poems to Maria White, and the ambitious pieces on national issues; — though there were two or three brief swallow flights of pure song that stand apart from either, like the happy, haunting lines beginning

> "O moonlight deep and tender,
> A year and more agone." . . .

In the decade between 1844 and 1854 all the varieties of poetic mood confusedly expressed in these two early volumes found riper and more effective utterance. Faulty as the poem is, Lowell's mystical impulse became for once masterly and convincing in "Sir Launfal;" and after this katharsis, so to say, it appeared less frequently in his later work, yet more often as a source of poetic power. His patriotic feeling found a fuller, more compelling voice in the "Biglow Papers," and his deep domestic affections a more penetrating human utterance in such poems as "She Came and Went" and "The Changeling." Finally in the "Fable for Critics," as well as in the "Biglow Papers," Lowell's fluent, irrepressible wit came into its own. Then, after six years of infrequent and faltering use

of his poetic faculty, came the war with its deep passion that rapt him to a poetic height which before and after he vainly struggled to climb. Yet something of the energy imparted to his mood persisted, and despite his editorial and academic pursuits he wrote considerably more verse and of a better quality in the six years following the war than in the ten years before. But even in the interesting "Cathedral" he never quite recaptured the old afflatus, though a notable improvement is evident in the firmness of his workmanship. Noting this advance in his Journal in 1868, Emerson added significantly: "It is in talent rather than in poetic tone, and rather expresses his wish, his ambition, than the uncontrollable poetic impulse which is the authentic mark of a new poem."

In his "Agassiz," as we have seen, Lowell was again rapt out of himself, and that ode surely bore "the authentic mark" of poetry. The three memorial poems written in 1875 and 1876 bore it, too, if a little less manifestly. During the decade of his diplomatic life, Lowell's poetry was occasional, — the by-product of a man of elegant scholarship and poetic gifts of imagination and humor, busily employed in large affairs. In the last five years of his life, when he was again vacant to the Muses, there was, in such poems as "Endymion," a curious reversion to his earlier

mystical manner. But the characteristic pieces of this period were those like "Turner's Old Téméraire," in which his poet's faith took issue as best it could with modern doubt. So far was there from being any decay of his talent that, leaving out of consideration a few casual pieces written for autograph albums and personal occasions, his work at threescore and ten will stand a careful scrutiny of its poetic tone and texture better than all but a very little that went before.

In considering Lowell's poetry in relation to his life, it is thus seen to be admirable and finely expressive; if, however, we take up the volume of his Complete Poetical Works and try to view it steadily as it is in itself, the result is at first a little disconcerting. With the exception of a few pieces, such, for example, as "The Courtin'" and "The Nightingale in the Study," it contains no "clear, unwrinkled song;" and the great bulk of the pieces in it have a way of eluding the memory after repeated readings that is unique even among poets of the nineteenth century. In the final edition of Lowell's poetical works some three hundred pieces are included. None, perhaps, is devoid of images of suggestive beauty, of valiant phrases, and haunting music. A sincere poetic feeling can be discerned in all. Yet

not more than one third leave any permanent trace in the memory, and — leaving out of consideration the longer poems, like the "Fable for Critics" and the "Biglow Papers," which must be attended to apart — less than fifty possess any vivid poetic life. The making of selections can never be quite impersonal, yet by general suffrage as well as by the writer's personal predilection, the following group of shorter pieces may reasonably be taken as the most likely candidates for length of days. "Irené," "My Love," "O moonlight deep and tender," "To M. W., on her Birthday," "Beloved, in the noisy city here," "In Absence," "I thought our love at full," "The Shepherd of King Admetus," "An Incident in a Railroad Car," "Hebe," "The Present Crisis," "To the Dandelion," "She Came and Went," "The Changeling," "Bibliolatres," "The Courtin'," "The First Snow-Fall," "The Wind-Harp," "Auf Wiedersehen," "After the Burial," "The Dead House," "Invita Minerva," "The Darkened Mind," "A Winter-Evening Hymn to my Fire," "Aladdin," "To Charles Eliot Norton," "To H. W. L.," "An Invitation," "An Ember Picture," "The Nightingale in the Study," "The Foot-Path," "The Washers of the Shroud," "Ode recited at the Harvard Commemoration," "Ode on the Hundredth Anniversary of the Fight at Concord

Bridge," "Under the Old Elm," "An Ode for the Fourth of July," "Agassiz," "Bankside," "An Epistle to George William Curtis," "Phœbe," "Das Ewig-Weibliche," "Monna Lisa," "On Burning Some Old Letters," "Death of Queen Mercedes," "The Pregnant Comment," "The Origin of Didactic Poetry," "Turner's Old Téméraire."

In a volume made up of these poems with the "Biglow Papers" added, and possibly "Sir Launfal" and the "Fable for Critics," we should have a part of Lowell's poetry vastly greater than the whole, which would make no mean showing beside the selected best of his American and English contemporaries.

If, now, we contrast the mood and quality of the numerous unnamed remainder with the mood and quality of the pieces tabulated above, we may perhaps arrive at the truth about Lowell as a poet.

By a not unnatural paradox, the deep poetic wonder at the world which was the principle of life in Lowell's best work was of the body of corruption in — shall we say? — his least best. The treachery of wonder as a poetic impulse lies in the fact that the mood of wonder is so elusive of communication. Lowell's visionary faculty was continually active. His eyes, like Coleridge's, "made pictures when they were

shut;" a Doppelgänger, he said, was his intimate, and "weird seizures" were frequent with him. He not seldom imagined himself "dispersed through space in some inconceivable fashion, and mixed with the milky way."[1] With the detached, unmystical Yankee half of him, he always held to the subjectivity of these experiences, yet such curious psychological states were indissolubly connected in his mind with his deepest sense of inspiration. In such seasons of complete poetic rapture as those in which he composed the "Commemoration Ode" and "Agassiz," his mystic's sense of "pure being" enabled him to paint those apparent pictures of unapparent realities, which, as Zoroaster said long ago, are the essence of poetry. But at other, cooler times his mixture with the milky way was the cause of his failure. There is a wan suffusion of mystical light, but no single bright stanza like a star. Too often there is some word or phrase that lets in a shaft of intellectual day, or of gaslight, that dispels the illusion of the whole.

A dissimilar yet kindred trait in his poetic constitution, which went far to invalidate his mystical sense, was his invincible tendency to the centrifugal amplification of his ideas. No one was better aware of this than Lowell him-

[1] *Letters*, iii, p. 28.

self; none phrased it better. So early as 1839, he writes with a shrewd self-judgment that the defect of his poetry is that it has "too many *thoughts* and too little *thought*." Yet never during his life was he wholly able to repress his fertility in brilliant, imperfectly apposite "thoughts." The expression of his views and opinions meant more to him — in all save his most ecstatic poetic moods — than the production of a perfect poem; and he was never steadily able to distinguish between the stress of opinions seeking utterance and the pure poetic impulse.[1] Of this, too, he was fully conscious, and, as usual, phrased it finally: "I shall never be a poet," he writes in his middle life, "until I get out of the pulpit, and New England was all meeting-house when I was growing up."

Lowell's habitual mood and manner of composition were not of a sort to correct his less admirable poetic tendencies. The prodigious speed with which he composed the "Commemoration Ode" was not at all exceptional with him. He was wont to write the first draft of a poem in pencil, and he frequently records of some piece that in writing it his pencil never hesitated, or

[1] In one of his commonplace books there is an entry throwing a curious light on this condition of mind: "'T is only while we are forming our opinions that we are very anxious to propagate them."

made a correction afterward. "Prometheus" was written in eight hours, the "Fable for Critics" "literally in a few hours," etc., etc. In short, through the first half of his poetic career he never composed; he effused. *Sufflaminandus erat.* The germ of a poem was delightful to him, but he had no pleasure in working it out to formal perfection.

The unfortunate results of this are nowhere to be seen more clearly than in "The Vision of Sir Launfal," wherein there is not only bad metrification of misplaced anapæsts but also a structure in which there is such want of correspondence in two nominally similar parts as to mislead the average reader as to the very meaning of the narrative. Most of the numerous commentators upon "Sir Launfal" have interpreted the poem as if the young knight actually adventured the quest and returned from it at the end of years, broken and old. Yet if the reader will take up the poem with a fresh and candid eye, giving particular attention to the closing lines of the first strophe of Part First, —

> "Slowly Sir Launfal's eyes grew dim,
> Slumber fell like a cloud on him,
> And into his soul the vision flew," —

and to the ninth strophe of Part Second, —

> "Sir Launfal awoke as from a swound:
> 'The Grail in my castle here is found!'" etc., —

he will see that Lowell intended to narrate what his title indicates, only a "*Vision*," that Sir Launfal never left his castle at all, and that the period of time presented in the poem is but a single night. A critic holding a special brief for Lowell the poet might plausibly lay this curious and common misinterpretation at the door of purblind annotators and careless readers. Yet this would be but a half truth, for the fact stands that the structure of the "Vision" proper, bisected as it is by the "Prelude to Part Second," of seemingly coördinate importance with the "Prelude to Part First," is equivocal to an astonishing degree, and that through half a century nine readers out of ten have mistaken Lowell's meaning. "The Vision of Sir Launfal" is in mood and intention a noble poem, — more noble, perhaps, and poetic, when interpreted as Lowell meant it should be, — yet no service is done its author's poetic fame by blinking its faults of style and structure.

In his later years, as Lowell's artistic sense ripened through long practice and much critical writing, his revision became, as we have seen, laborious, sometimes even a little fidgety. Of the composition of "The Cathedral" he says, for instance, "I wrote in pencil, then copied it out in ink, and worked over it as I never worked over anything before. I may fairly say that

there is not a word in it over which I have not thought, not an objection which I did not foresee and maturely consider." Yet even after this manner of work had become habitual with him, his revision was always stylistic rather than structural, and he most commonly, as he confessed, returned to his first draft at the end. He could never quite bring himself to practice the immortalizing art of the poetic goldsmith, to enrich by cutting away.

"The Grecian gluts me with its perfectness,"

wrote Lowell in "The Cathedral," and it was always a peculiarity of his taste to care little for the formal beauties of any classic art, to take deeper delight in an emphatically expressive gargoyle than in a faultless column. Given this native bias of taste and his habitude of the improvisatore, and it is not surprising that so many of his poems should be spotted with gargoyles of phrase. "The Cathedral" itself is of course the most numerously bedecked of all his poems with this style of ornamentation, and in view of the subject, not inappropriately. Yet even here scores of lines like

"Plastering our swallow-nests on the awful Past,"

seem needlessly gnarled. In other poems a single violent phrase is sometimes enough to damage the piece irreparably.

The list of Lowell's indiscretions of phrase is a long one and has been often enough presented. It is but a piece of minor corroborating evidence of that lack of utter energy of conception, of completely painstaking craftsmanship, which made so large a proportion of his poems fall short of his own best, and of the poetic best of men who were his inferiors in general literary ability. To recognize how lacking the body of Lowell's work — exclusive of the "Biglow Papers" and the happy handful set apart above — is in true poetic distinction, one has but to try to parody it convincingly, or to take a characteristic piece like his lines "On a Portrait of Dante by Giotto," and compare it with such a poem as Parsons's "On the Bust of Dante." The mood of the one is as truly poetic as that of the other, but Parsons's poem has eternalizing form and Lowell's has not.

But save when too facile admiration tends to confuse our standards of judgment, the reprobation of faults in a dead poet's work is ungrateful business. The defects of Lowell's poetic quality, the source of the impermanence of the greater part of his poetry, has been dwelt on at quite sufficient length; it will be pleasanter and more profitable to look for the secret of the abiding charm of that handful of "best

poems" whereby he will, as a poet, be remembered.

If there is one trait which more than any other distinguishes Lowell's poetry at its best, it is the utter and fervent sincerity of the moods expressed in it.

"You will have noticed," he writes in 1868, "that many of the poems in my book are moody — perhaps unhealthy. . . . I was mainly induced to print them that I might get rid of them by shutting them between two covers." And returning to the subject in another letter written seven years later he says: "I suppose it must have been the extreme solitude in which I grew up, and my consequent unconsciousness of any public, that made me so frankly communicative." Whatever the source of Lowell's frank communication of his most intimate moods, whatever his motive in printing, it is certain that it is precisely this quality which gives such direct and compelling pathos to "She Came and Went," "The Changeling," "The First Snow-Fall," "The Wind-Harp," "Auf Wiedersehen," "After the Burial," "The Dead House," and "The Darkened Mind." It is the same sincerity, a little less poignantly personal, a little more fully universalized, that informs the deeper harmonies of the "Commemoration Ode" and "Agassiz." Compare such poems as these with anything of Poe's or Whit-

man's, with the cooler artistry of Bryant or Longfellow, with the more facile singing of Whittier, even with the most spontaneous poetizing of Emerson, and in a certain fervor of sincerity Lowell's moves us more deeply and humanly if not with the finest æsthetic charm.

A second trait of his best poetic work, only a little less characteristic than his sincerity, was the amount of mind that lay back of it. Lowell himself noted in certain poets "That Ben Franklin quality . . . which one recognizes also in Shakespeare. In such natures the imagination seems to spire up like a Gothic cathedral over a prodigiously solid crypt of common sense." Lowell himself had much of this "Ben Franklin quality," and even the analogy with Shakespeare is not inapt; for in variety and versatility, if not in degree, Lowell had something of the Shakespearean mind, — more of it, at any rate, than any other American poet. So, despite his scattering of inapposite thoughts, despite his wannesses of wonder, we are likely to find in his best poetry, especially in his later life, a solid core of intellectual nutriment, — a meaning, — sometimes, as in "Turner's Old Téméraire," a poetic meaning.

A third life-giving trait of Lowell's poetry was the consistent ideality, which was both root and branch of his sincerity and of his abounding in-

tellectual life. With all his perturbations and harassings of doubt no American poet, not even Emerson or Poe, fulfilled his poetry more powerfully than Lowell with the spiritual sense of life. His lively perception of the invisible realities never flagged, whether he were dealing with the life of men, — around him in society or recorded in old books, — or with the sights and sounds, the moods and mysterious beauties, of Nature.

In certain of his pieces he is more nearly "The American Wordsworth" than Bryant or than any other of our poets. None other was so sensitive to impalpable impulses from vernal woods, or found so readily spiritual food in the "balancing of a yellow butterfly over a thistle-bloom." But there was in Lowell's love of nature something of a pagan sensuousness that marks a difference. He "was born," he writes, "to sit on a fence in the sun," he felt the earth "thrill under his feet," in a way that one suspects even Wordsworth was not very familiar with. Hence came a lack of the high imaginative unity of spiritual preoccupation that is the secret of power in Wordsworth. But hence came, too, that smack of native earth, that echo of bird songs, that make so many lines of Lowell's poetry cling to American memories with the keen freshness and fragrance of a New England spring.

But not sincerity, mind-work, ideality, love of

nature — neither one nor all together — will make a man a good poet. They will be likely to make him a good man, but a good poet he will not be unless he have the last indispensable gift of poetic style, a certain inevitable way of putting things, the knack of weaving a texture of words that may have a lively beauty and a real existence of its own. Lowell had this gift, but intermittently; it is shown multitudinously in lines and passages, rarely through entire poems.

The quality of Lowell's poetic style at its very best is of a pithy and noble grandiloquence. It has a pregnancy that has always been one of the characteristic marks of English as contrasted with French or Italian poetry. It has a certain savor of scholarship, particularly of seventeenth-century scholarship, yet seldom does the cryptic inkhorn term obtrude itself. In such a poem as "Agassiz," — which the present writer is sometimes disposed to consider Lowell's very best in the grand manner, — the verse rolls along in a grave, majestically cadenced stream rising to a climax in the strophe beginning

> "I cannot think he wished so soon to die,"

that in the beauty of "high and passionate thoughts to their own music chanted" need fear comparison with no memorial poetry in the world. And in "The Cathedral," side by side

with undissolved particles of prose, are lines and passages of pure and perfect poetry that give no uncertain taste of the quality of the poet Lowell might have been under more favoring stars, in an age more given to creating beauty and less to lecturing about it. How fresh is the image of these lines: —

> "No rose, I doubt, was ever,[1] like the first,
> A marvel to the bush it dawned upon;"

how satisfying the large Cowleyesque cadence and accent of these, —

> "I think man's soul dwells nearer to the east,
> Nearer to morning's fountains than the sun;"

how thrilling the invocation to Freedom, —

> "O mountain-born, sweet with snow-filtered air
> From uncontaminate wells of ether drawn
> And never-broken secrecies of sky." . . .

Looking at Lowell's poetical achievement in the round, one thing is especially remarkable: it was best when least subjective; when instead of throwing the rein upon the neck of his fantasy, he curbed it and brought into harmonious play the aptitudes of the critic and humanist which were the other half of his genius. Considered by the approved standards of poetic art, his occasional poems, whether threnodies for Harvard youth slain in the war for nationality, for Queen

[1] The comma is in all texts.

Mercedes too early dead, or bookish pieces in a suave, frankly academic vein like "The Nightingale in the Study" or the lines to Longfellow on his birthday, outweigh all his moody lyric musings. And the flavor of the man was more fully expressed in them than in the pieces wherein he labored to express it.

The multiplicity of Lowell's poetic manners has a little confused our judgment of his work, but as time goes on the winnowing suffrage of the years makes his work as a satirist, the mood in which he began, and to which he returned intermittently throughout his life, seem his most enduring poetic expression. With his yearning to be the poet of wonder, of the mystical moods of Nature and of the Soul, Lowell seems to have taken his satirical writing less and less seriously. Yet it may be doubted whether anything of his in the field of pure poetry has quite the poetic vitality of his excursions into the field of what may be called *applied poetry*. Little as he liked to be reminded of it in his later years, Lowell was the author of the "Biglow Papers," and it is as the author of the "Biglow Papers" that he is likely to be longest remembered. It is needless to add anything here to what has already been said of the "Biglow Papers," of the first series and of the second. In variety, unction, quotability, ethical earnestness, humor,

wit, fun, even in pure poetry and pathos, they stand quite by themselves in American literature. Criticism cannot touch them. They are vital with the whole quality of a true man, and the patriotic emotion of a true people. For fifty years they have furnished delightful reading to thousands of American and English readers, and they will continue to furnish it. For even though the political allusions in them grow more and more misty with the years, their deep national quality, their literary salt, their tough homespun texture, will keep them from dusty corruption.

It is needless to worry about what Lowell might have been as a poet under more propitious skies, with a little more single-mindedness, a little less variety of occupation. Clough's suggestion that Lowell's *magnum opus* should be an American "Canterbury Tales" was a shrewd one, but "Fitz Adam's Story," interesting as it is, is not conspicuous for narrative gift; and, in the long run, that a poet does n't do it is pretty fair working proof that he can't do it. So it is idle to prepare for Lowell an obituary in his own mock American style: "He wrote no epic, but if he had, etc., etc."

His more ambitious poems were a source of spiritual stimulus and refreshment to thousands

of his contemporaries, and if not many of them have eternalizing form, a few of them will last by sheer force and elevation of mood, and more will doubtless continue long to quicken the imagination of American youth in the schools, who can approach the whole body of Lowell's poetry in something of a freshly contemporary spirit.

So by a devious road we come to the conclusion of the whole matter. If, by the gradual diffusion of Lowell's first poetic impulse, and its application in other affairs of a various life, it lost a little in pure immortalizing intensity, yet the "Commemoration Ode" and the "Biglow Papers" have a valid and perdurable claim to remembrance; and the place of the man himself as one of the poets-militant below is secure. And if, as Lowell wrote in one of his note-books, the poet's business is to make heroes as well as sing them, none has performed it better.

CHAPTER VIII

LOWELL'S PROSE

1. *His Talk.*

LOWELL'S talk was never prosy. Leslie Stephen, who had every opportunity of knowing, has recorded that save perhaps on the subject of his astonishing faculty for the detection of Jews, Lowell could not possibly come within measurable distance of boring; and in the offices of his publishers there is still a tradition that he never called on the most casual business without leaving behind him something quotable that would be passed from mouth to mouth for days. Yet his talk was singularly of a piece with his letters and his essays. In a real and underogatory sense Lowell "talked prose." So, in dealing with his "spontaneous, enthusiastic, and versatile" expression, — to employ a convenient formula which, however it may fit American literature as a whole, is strikingly applicable to Lowell, — it will be of advantage to consider it when most spontaneous, most enthusiastic, most versatile, — in short, in his familiar talk.

All his life long Lowell was a great talker. In youth a certain assertive shyness that was characteristic of him seems to have made him now restively silent, now feverishly voluble. But this over-emphasis wore off as he saw more of the world. He was seldom quite easily himself in large companies, but in a small circle of congenial friends he was a perfect master of the conversational instrument.

The idiosyncrasy of Lowell's talk was its flexibility. Unlike most great Anglo-Saxon talkers of his sex, he had a fine sensitiveness to his hearer's feelings. "Lowell," says Leslie Stephen, "was so quick at knowing what were the dangerous topics, that I do not think he could ever have given pain unless he felt it to be a duty." As he grew older, the lecture habit grew upon him, and he came to have at times, as an English friend complains, "an airy omniscience," "a minute and circumstantial way of laying down the law." Yet for him talk never ceased to mean *conversation*, lively with give and take, picturesque with curious allusion and racy phrase, pliant and cordial with sincere friendliness, and never marred by a mean or an ill-natured judgment.

When in the mood for it with a congenial companion, Lowell could talk in paragraphs, patiently endeavoring to thread the difficult needle of truth. But his more characteristic manner in

conversation, as in letter writing or essay writing, was discursive and vivid. He was never able to resist the seduction of the fantastic, the paradoxical, the daring. He abounded in quips and cranks, recondite jokes and puns. His applying to an unintelligent person "the quadrisyllabic name of the brother of Agis, King of Sparta," which after much research was discovered to have been Eudamidas, seems to have been a jest of a type he was fond of, but too elaborate to be fairly typical of his conversational style. Longfellow records in his "Journal" that at Lowell's supper to Thackeray the latter said in bidding his host farewell, "We have stayed too long!" "I should say," replied Lowell, "one long and two short, a dactylic supper." Some of his witticisms were reminiscent of his reading rather than strictly original. He wrote in a letter of a talk between Dr. Holmes and Anthony Trollope, that "it was pelting a rhinoceros with seed pearls." Leigh Hunt, in his "Autobiography," had recently written of Charles Lamb's dealing with an hypothetical antagonist of similar stamp that he would have "pelted his head with pearls." Such instances are numerous, yet there is no hint of conscious or laborious artifice in their use.

Lowell's good things, to quote Leslie Stephen once again, "came up as spontaneously as bubbles in a spring," and it is in this quality that

the unity of his oral and written prose becomes most apparent. Expression with him always meant improvisation, depending for its effectiveness on the stimulus of the occasion, the fervor or animation of his mood.

Perhaps the most explicit single account of Lowell's talk that has been preserved is that by an anonymous writer in the "Atlantic Monthly"[1] who had known the Lowells at home and saw something of them in Paris. "Mr. Lowell," she says, "was more fond of talking than any one else I ever knew." In the course of the talks Lowell seems to have caught the light on nearly every facet of his many-faceted mind. He displayed an astonishingly minute and accurate familiarity with all the details of Parisian local history; he discoursed at large, as was his wont, upon the Jews, and his own peculiar gift of detecting hidden strains of Hebrew blood in the most unlikely persons; he extemporized in French a witty fantastic letter from a French doll to an English doll. Yet underneath this medley of learning, paradox, and wit, the listener was conscious of the fine single-mindedness, the incorruptible Puritanism of the man. Moral judgments were constantly uppermost in his mind, and he was always rapping out some terse, unconventional, sincere expression of righteous

[1] For January, 1897.

feeling. Mr. Barrett Wendell has told of going as an undergraduate to call upon Lowell, unwittingly on an evening when he had heard of the death of an old and dear friend, and of hearing, or, as it were, overhearing from Lowell a series of deep musings upon death that had something of the solemn sentiment, the elegiac cadence of a great prose threnody by Browne or Bossuet.

In short, in Lowell's conversation, as in all his expression, we discover the essential puzzling antinomy between the simple transparent nature of the man and his complex and willful intellect. Finally to characterize his talk we shall have to resort to manifold comparison. Perhaps we shall describe it most exactly if we say that to something of the vast and ready learning of Macaulay's, the homely wisdom of Franklin's, the nimble-footed, sweetly-stuttered fantasy of Lamb's, it united a human friendliness, a moral sincerity, all its own. This is not saying that Lowell's talk *as* talk was better than that of any or all of these famous talkers. Very likely in a competitive conversation it would have suffered precisely from its variety of modes, its lack of permanent pose, of artful manner. Yet Lowell's talk was always *his* talk, and always good talk. If we may adapt to our uses Bronson Alcott's pleasant formula and suppose that Shakespeare had visited Cambridge at any time between 1856

and 1872, no lover of Lowell can doubt for whom he would have inquired first.

2. *His Letters.*

> . . . "Letters, so it seems to me,
> Our careless quintessence should be,
> Our real nature's careless play
> When Consciousness looks t' other way ;
> Not drop by drop, with watchful skill,
> Gathered in Art's deliberate still,
> But life's insensible completeness
> Got as the ripe grape gets its sweetness,
> As if it had a way to fuse
> The golden sunlight into juice."

This was Lowell's ideal of the perfect letter, and in his familiar correspondence we find precisely this careless, undeliberate play of his real nature. As in his talk there was always a nice attention to the physical form of speech, to tone and modulation, so in his letters we have a regard for physical appearance that at first seems a little artificial. The balance of the page is carefully considered, there are turn-over catchwords at the bottom of each page, and when writing to literary persons, he affects the long "f." But this is no more than the natural retrospective instinct of the gentleman and scholar. In the substance of his letters there is little trace of artifice. They were written always at top speed, never copied, and they show singu-

larly few corrections or interlineations. So the letters, a little more considerate than his talk, a little less elaborate than his essays, contain perhaps the very best of Lowell.

As Lowell's talk was *con*versation, so his letters were *cor*respondence. They were written not, as so many classic bodies of English letters have been, to afford the pleasure of self-expression to a cloistered scholar like Gray, a wistful poet like Cowper, or an eccentric recluse like Fitz-Gerald. They were written, rather, because of some actual occasion for writing, to answer or to ask questions, to communicate news and views, to afford pleasure to the recipient by some elaborate epistolary jest. Yet Lowell poured himself out in them as he always did in any form of composition when once his pen was fairly going. His learning, his political interests, his love of nature, his poetic vision, his likes and dislikes, his human hopes and fears, all are there, and everywhere are beams of his inextinguishable humor and flashes of his irrepressible wit.

Lowell's letters have been so chief a part of the texture of this book that it is needless to give here any further specimens of their various quality. Yet to show Lowell's happy mastery of the occasional letter as a form of composition it may be worth while to pause over this little note of introduction: —

Cambridge, Sunday,
11th Sept. 1860.

My dear Charles,

for the first time I am glad not to have had a letter from you, — for it would have been a reproach to me while I was able in your debt. I could not write now even though I have been silent so long, except to give you my love & correspondence, I take it, has this in common with that talk between friends that it allows spaces of silence now & then as a proper neutral background for words when they come. Of course I have been busy. I have written a political article for the November number which was uphill work, for, after I had laid it all out, comes me Senator Seward with that excellent

C. E. N.

CAMBRIDGE, August 5, 1860.

MY DEAR HAWTHORNE, — I have no Masonic claim upon you except community of tobacco, and the young man who brings this does not smoke.

But he wants to look at you, which will do you no harm, and him a great deal of good.

His name is Howells, and he is a fine young fellow, and has written several *poems* in the "Atlantic," which of course you have never read, because you don't do such things yourself, and are old enough to know better.

When I think how much you might have profited by the perusal of certain verses of somebody who shall be nameless — but, no matter! If my judgment is good for anything, this youth has more in him than any of our younger fellows in the way of rhyme.

Of course he can't hope to rival the *Consule Planco* men. Therefore let him look at you, and charge it

To yours always,

J. R. LOWELL.[1]

How perfect in its way this is; and what could be more charming than this other written to a young lady who had contracted an engagement of marriage in a house where Lowell was stay-

[1] *Letters*, ii, 52.

ing, and who in writing to announce it to him had said she fancied he had seen what was going on: —

"Because you had entered into the great conspiracy of nature, you thought everybody must suspect. You feared each bush an officer. But no. I was blinder than a bat — for a bat is blind only at the behest of alliteration, and I was so through the whole alphabet impartially. No, you held your secret as tight as a rosebud."

If we compare Lowell's letters, as we justly may, with the best-beloved letters in the language, — Walpole's, Gray's, Cowper's, FitzGerald's, and Stevenson's, — some significant differences will appear. Considered objectively as a body of letters, Lowell's lose a little in effectiveness as compared with the others precisely through their lack of the *quasi*-artistic unity that comes from the consistent attitude toward life held by a perfectly integrated personality, even, or perhaps one might better say, especially, if it be a little eccentric as the world counts eccentricity. The recluse, the hermit, the exile for health, have the advantage of forming more secure conclusions, of dwelling upon them more uninterruptedly, of envisaging them more vividly, than the man in a world of men can hope to do. With all Lowell's talk of his Cantabrigian seclusion, his solitary bookish hours at Elmwood, he

was never in the least a recluse or a hermit, nor did he have the temperament of one. So we shall never find in Lowell's letters quite the edge, the unity, the enduring distinction of Gray's, of FitzGerald's, or of Stevenson's. Nor have they quite the attraction of the easy amused worldliness that has immortalized Walpole's. In tone and quality, they are perhaps nearer to Cowper's than to any of the others. As edited by the discreet hand of Mr. Norton, they do not show quite the mutuality, the reflection of the correspondent, that is one of the chief charms of Cowper's correspondence; despite their affectionateness, they are hardened a little by the greater prevalence of wit than humor; nor do they have quite the same unassuming, unsurpassed felicity of phrase. But in half-tender, half-playful sentiment, in variety and ease, they are fully equal to those of the poet of Olney.

In thoroughly assimilated, unobtrusive learning, in the vigorous expression of sound views on contemporary questions of importance, Lowell's letters need fear comparison with no letters whatever; while in view of this learning and of the public eminence of the writer their sudden sallies of boyishness are peculiarly engaging. If they have not quite the chance of becoming classic that FitzGerald's have, or Stevenson's, they are at any rate likely to last as long as any others

that have been written since Cowper's day. They have a special claim upon American readers as the finest and most delightful body of letters yet written in this country.

3. *His Essays.*

As one studying Lowell's prose ascends the scale of formality from his talk to his letters, and comes at last to his literary essays, the impression of the continuity of it all constantly deepens. Lowell had a way of uttering a good thing in talk, then jotting it down in his notebook, then writing it to a correspondent, and then using it, a little filed and polished, in whatever he happened to be composing at the time. One has in consequence a marked sense of parallelism in thought and phrase in the three modes of his prose expression. But the real bond of connection lies deeper than that. It is rather that the essays in his most characteristic vein have precisely the quality of witty and learned extemporization, ingenuous, undeliberate, sincere, that distinguished his talk and his correspondence. Pretty nearly everything in his essays "seems," as he finely says of Dryden's prose, "struck off at a heat, as by a superior man in the best mood of his talk."

As with Lowell's poetry, so with his prose, the impression of hastiness which it gives comes from

the actual fact of its rapid composition. He is continually complaining in his letters that he is barely "keeping abreast of the press," or "writing with the Devil (printer's) at his elbow;" and this account of the matter is very little exaggerated. His preliminary studies for an essay were laborious and long, but he wrote with great speed, almost always with the sense of external pressure, and he had very little opportunity, and, one suspects, very little taste, for revision.

The most obvious result of this manner of composition is a lack of firmness of outline that is a very serious flaw in his literary essays considered as works of prose art. Take his "Lessing" as a perfectly typical essay, and look at its ordonnance. It will be found to be made up of five sections, as follows: —

I. One page; the gaucheries of biographers in general with special relation to Burns.

II. Eight pages; a violent transition to a discussion of the absurd lack of proportion, style, and humor in German Literature.

III. Eight pages; a slightly easier transition to the faults of Herr Stahr as a biographer.

IV. Two and one half pages; the faults of Mr. Evans as a translator.

V. Fifty pages; Lessing.

This loose and roundabout structure is not exceptional. It is the rule in nearly all of Lowell's

essays, and it finds a curious parallel in the imperfectly syllogistic texture of his prose. Of the rhetorical quality of coherence, whether of sentences or of paragraphs, he was habitually negligent. One must not insist upon this too pedantically. Yet there is no more enduring quality of good prose than closeness of grain, and the writer who neglects to strive after it does so at his peril. Looking still more closely at the fibre of his writing, one finds a surprising number of small cacophonies — hard processions of consonants, series of words ending in "ly," etc. — that could never have survived painstaking revision. Nor is it at all likely that Lowell's cooler eye would have looked with favor upon numerous defects of taste like that reference to "the shot that shattered the forecasting brain and curdled the warm sweet heart of the most American of Americans."

In an occasional review article in a magazine, such indiscretions are not especially sinful, and Lowell's contemporary repute did not suffer by them; but it is precisely this lack of lucid order and labor of the file that will keep him, peradventure, from being numbered among that little company of writers of classic English prose, to which his great gifts should have gained him entrance.

But rather than linger over the recapitulation

of Lowell's wrongdoings in prose, it will be more fruitful to consider their genesis, their relation to the whole constitution of his mind, and to the admirable qualities of his writing.[1]

The causes of Lowell's failure in close prose structure were many, and intricately related. The opposition of his professorial and editorial pursuits had something to do with it. Most of his essays were patched together from old lectures and so, while they gained somewhat in fullness of learning and closeness of reference, lost a little in the integrity that comes from fresh and keen conception. The habit of turning aside from the right line of progress to cull the elegant extract, which he contracted in his youth, was certainly fostered by his practice of discursive lecturing, and only partially corrected by the

[1] Any one who wishes to consider further the case of the *advocatus diaboli* against Lowell has but to refer to a volume by Prof. William Cleaver Wilkinson, entitled "A Free Lance in Life and Letters," published in 1874. Professor Wilkinson approaches Lowell's writings with something of the temper of a reviewer of the eighteenth century. Along with many jejune reflections and eccentric half truths will be found some shrewd observations and a striking roll-call of Lowell's literary peccadilloes. The best answer is to read a page, any page, of Lowell's discursive, energetic, vital prose. Lowell himself never perused the professor's book. If he had, he might have corrected many inconsistencies and a few solecisms in his collected works, but he would, I doubt, have experienced no very deep conviction of sin.

development of his editorial instinct. His very sense of humor was sometimes a hindrance to him, for only a vigorous artistic faculty, or a present inspiration of the uttermost momentum, can keep an exuberant wit from lapsing into the grotesque and irrelevant.

But deeper than any of these things as a cause of ill-coördinated structure was a certain characteristic impatience of mind, — a desire to have done with the facts and get at the truth of the matter. Time and time again, Lowell begins an essay with the customary biographical narrative, pauses to note a significant fact, is fired by it to expatiation, passes to the end of the matter in some half dozen pages of lively, eloquent writing, and then returns resignedly to take up the matter in hand. It rarely occurs to him to leave anything out.

It is a curious fact, darkly connected with another upon which I have earnestly insisted in speaking of our author as a man, that the lack of unity in Lowell's characteristic prose is intellectual rather than emotional. Nearly all of it has the unity of feeling that might be expected in the work of a man of simple, sincere character, however complex and willful his intellect, however elusive his temperament. In the essays like "My Garden Acquaintance," "On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners," or "A Good

Word for Winter," written out of himself, not out of books, there is a close imaginative coherence that leaves no ground for even the most meticulous critic to carp. Furthermore, whenever Lowell was compelled by the exigencies of occasion to bridle the play of his intellect, to subdue his almost feminine eagerness, his license, to the personal note, to direct it in a given channel, his prose at once gained in quality. It is significant to note in some parts of the writings of Parson Wilbur, and in some other passages of Lowell's work, like the fictitious speech of Johnson in "The President on the Stump," where his prose is steadied and restrained by being made dramatic and considered, rather than lyrical and spontaneous, how it wins suddenly the accent and rhythm of the very best English prose. In such passages Lowell's prose escapes all the familiar faults of the improvisatore, and becomes what it might always have been, close, pregnant, and wholly noble discourse. The conditions of oral delivery, too, acted as a restraining influence, and some parts of his speeches are more admirable as prose than any but the very best of his essays.

But here again we are in danger of uttering that idle lament for what might have been. The Lowell that voiced himself through a lifetime of prose expression in talk, in letters, in essays,

was too full and rich a man, of too much genius, to be judged wholly by formal standards. His talk, as has been said, was *his* talk, and his written prose was *his* prose, with very vital qualities of its own.

Savory is perhaps the best word wherewith to describe the quality of Lowell's prose style. In part this savoriness is a matter of diction. Lowell was in the best sense a true lover of words; and he used them with a smack of delight that gives a charming fresh youthfulness to his most mature writing. In his letters he says "a word that clings to the memory is always a good word — that 's the way to test them," and, as it happened, there were few words that touched his memory that did not cling to it. He shared an old belief now a little out of fashion that there is no word in the language that will not express some particular idea, some *nuance* of meaning, better than any other word. Yet he seldom fell into the fallacy of trying to find a meaning for his words. With him the meaning came first, and the word tumbling after. So he poured them out, big words, little words, racy monosyllables of popular speech, terms of art, inkhorn terms, hoary sesquipedalians big with old meanings; and sometimes if he could not find in his memory the word he wanted he would make one for the occasion. Hence came in his best prose that union

of vitality and antiquarianism in diction which is one of its chief charms. Side by side with subtilely allusive phrases that thrill the ripe reader with gleaming memories of old and far-off authors, will be found some breezy vocable of the street that strikes a sudden gust of fresh air across the page.

The defect of this quality was that Lowell lacked quite the "choiceful sense" to make it constantly effective. He was capricious in this as in everything else. Sometimes the breezy vocable was too breezy and blew the decent draperies of convention about too wantonly, sometimes the prodigious sesquipedalian was too obviously dragged in by its inky heels. Words like "quintessentialized," a kind of which he is fond, bring the reader up with too short a turn. In his essay on "Witchcraft," for example, Lowell wrote, "You may see imaginative children every day anthropomorphizing in this way." How sad it is — to say nothing of the awkward jingle of "day" and "way" — how sad it is to see little children *anthropomorphizing!*

But, after all, such indiscretions are not very common in Lowell's prose. Habitually his diction is full and flexible, with a finely sensitive way of taking color, catching fire from the matter in hand. In his essay on Milton, for instance, note how he absorbs unction from his

subject, takes far more phrases and images from the classics than is his wont, and writes with an imaginative magniloquence wholly worthy of the theme. Or see how in "A Great Public Character" he catches the grave, nobly measured accent of the prose of an earlier generation. How nice the choice of words, how musical the cadence, how classic the note of these sentences: "I have seen many old men whose lives were mere waste and desolation, who made longevity disreputable by their untimely persistence in it; but in Mr. Quincy's length of years there was nothing that was not venerable. To him it was fulfillment, not deprivation; the days were marked to the last for what they brought, not for what they took away."

Another great spring of savoriness in Lowell's essays was their wit. Lowell's wit was not a mere jest-making faculty; it was, rather, like the wit of Donne, the exuberant play of a subtle, ingenious intellect, filling the man's work everywhere, not merely with jests, but with quaint conceits, odd analogies, elaborately humorous similitudes, "brave translunary things." A good deal of his working wit lay in referring to common objects in a poetic diction resembling that of the eighteenth century; thus whitewash became "candent baptism," Holland gin, "Batavian elixir," etc. This habit sometimes

led him to elaborate the phrasing of his witty turns a little too much. In the essay on Milton it is well said of the facetiousness of a heavy man that "he tramples out the last spark of cheerfulness with the broad, damp foot of a hippopotamus." But how much *form* avails in wit may be seen by comparing this in its feminine picturesqueness of detail with the terser, more masculine wit of Cowper when he wrote of a similar phenomenon, "Serious yet epigrammatic like a bishop at a ball."

Perhaps the chief service of Lowell's wit to his prose was in providing him with figurative illustrations and formulas for his meaning. There is no prose in the language richer in homely, telling figures. What could be better than this of the beginning of an active policy toward the slavery question, "The nettle had been stroked long enough, it was time to try a firm grip;" or what more startlingly, yet appropriately fantastic than the conclusion of this passage in his "Emerson the Lecturer," where a paragraph of the most tender feeling, beautiful imagery, and haunting rhythm suddenly and characteristically concludes with a ripple of mocking laughter and a broad smile: —

"And who that saw the audience will ever forget it, where every one still capable of fire, or longing to renew in himself the half-forgotten

sense of it, was gathered? Those faces, young and old, agleam with pale intellectual light, eager with pleased attention, flash upon me once more from the deep recesses of the years with an exquisite pathos. Ah, beautiful young eyes, brimming with love and hope, wholly vanished now in that other world we call the Past, or peering doubtfully through the pensive gloaming of memory, your light impoverishes these cheaper days! I hear again that rustle of sensation, as they turned to exchange glances over some pithier thought, some keener flash of that humor which always played about the horizon of his mind like heat lightning, and it seems now like the sad whisper of the autumn leaves that are whirling around me. But would my picture be complete if I forgot that ample and vegete countenance of Mr. R—— of W——, —how, from its regular post at the corner of the front bench, it turned in ruddy triumph to the profaner audience as if he were the inexplicably appointed fugleman of appreciation? I was reminded of him by those hearty cherubs in Titian's Assumption that look at you as who should say, 'Did you ever see a Madonna like *that?* Did you ever behold one hundred and fifty pounds of womanhood mount heavenward before like a rocket?' "

It is not hard now to see how perfectly the

quality of Lowell's formal prose relates itself back to the quality of his talk and his letters, how finely it expresses his whole nature, how it is in itself what the man himself always wished above all things to be, — *likable*. Yet it never realizes all the possibilities of good English writing. The true prose after all *is* Attic prose. Lowell's prose is never quite that. Indeed, with his temperament, his training, his environment, it could not possibly have been so. No one felt this more keenly than Lowell himself. No one has stated it more picturesquely than Hosea Biglow: —

"Mistur Wilbur sez he to me onct, sez he, 'Hosee,' sez he, 'in litterytoor the only good thing is Natur. It 's amazin' hard to come at,' sez he, 'but onct git it an' you 've gut everythin'. Wut 's the sweetest smell on airth?' sez he. 'Noomone hay,' sez I, pooty bresk, for he wuz allus hankerin' round in hayin'. 'Nawthin' of the kine,' sez he. 'My leetle Huldy's breath,' sez I ag'in. 'You 're a good lad,' sez he, his eyes sort of ripplin' like, for he lost a babe onct nigh about her age, — 'you 're a good lad; but 't ain't thet nuther,' sez he. 'Ef you want to know,' sez he, 'open your winder of a mornin' et ary season, and you 'll larn thet the best of perfooms is jest fresh air, *fresh air*,' sez he, emphysizin', 'athout no mixtur. Thet 's wut *I* call natur in writin', and

it bathes my lungs and washes 'em sweet whenever I git a whiff on 't,' sez he. I offen think o' thet when I set down to write, but the winders air *so* ept to git stuck, an' breakin' a pane costs sunthin'."

Lowell himself was never quite able to get along without breaking a pane, and it has cost him his position among the first masters of English prose, but he remains none the less the most savory and most delightful of our American essayists.

4. *Lowell as a Critic.*

But we have dwelt perhaps too long upon the formal attributes and the personal flavor of Lowell's prose. It is high time for us to look at its substance, to consider the import of his work as a critic of literature, and to determine as best we may the place of his work in the history of American criticism.

It is still a little early for any very promising attempt at vaticination as to the nature of Lowell's most enduring fame, yet so far as one may judge from current allusions to his work, from the relative sales of his books, as well as from the actual quality of the books themselves, it seems more than likely that his work as a critic of literature will last in greater bulk than anything else of his. He himself came to find in his in-

creasing devotion to the tenth Muse an increasingly satisfactory means of self-expression, and the critic's word is, after all, the last word, — at least until another critic answers him.

In Lowell's critical writing two discrete traditions of American criticism were for the first time merged. He shared largely in the classical, refined, scholarly ideals of Irving and Ticknor, so constantly aware of European judgments, yet with them he combined a certain enthusiastic gusto of appreciation, a tingling receptivity to the flavor of books, that marked him of a different race of critics. As was usual with Lowell, these various strains were a little discordant in his work.

It is highly probable that Lowell would have been a better critic, whatever he might have been as a poet and general essayist, had he written in London or Paris instead of Cambridge. Could he have kept the freshness of curiosity of the small university city unimpaired, and added unto it the secure balance, the true catholicity that is "of the centre," his critical work would have been hard to equal. As it is, it is precisely in balance, and, despite the vast range of his reading, in catholicity, that he sometimes falls short of his best.

Lowell's critical method was never that of insidious urbane circumvallation which since

Sainte-Beuve has been increasingly the ideal of critical procedure. With Lowell, criticism is rather a matter of adventurous sallies and spectacular sword-play. At its best nothing could be more vigorous and refreshing; short of its best it often falls into perversity and paradox. His extreme and unguarded statements are legion: "Wordsworth," he says, "was wholly void of that shaping imagination which is the highest criterion of the poet." Here he undoubtedly had in mind to say something that is quite true, but neither the sentence quoted nor the context says it, and as it stands it is surely the wrong thing to say of the author of the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality." Or, as another instance of an unguarded statement saying more than was intended, take this: "I have since read over every line that Pope ever wrote, and every letter written by or *to him*[1] and that more than once." A critic writing at the centre could scarcely have said this, and it is just such expressions as this that sow the seeds of corruption in too many of Lowell's critical essays.

Perhaps the most common field for the exercise of his critical indiscretion was the literary analogy, the parallel passage. His taste in phrase was so keen, his memory for words so retentive, that it needed but the same word in two passages

[1] The italics are mine.

by different authors for him to infer that there must be a relation between them. Thus, to take but a single instance from a multitude, he writes in his "Spenser:" —

"Shakespeare had read and remembered this pastoral. Compare

> 'But, ah, Mæcenas is y-clad in clay,
> And great Augustus long ago is dead,
> And all the worthies liggen wrapt in lead,'

with

> 'King Pandion he is dead;
> All thy friends are lapt in lead.'

It is odd that Shakespeare, in his 'lapt in lead,' is more Spenserian than Spenser himself, from whom he caught this 'hunting of the letter.'"

To say nothing of the peculiar fact that the second citation is not by Shakespeare at all, and that Richard Barnfield's authorship of the section of "The Passionate Pilgrim" containing it had already been discovered at the time Lowell was writing, so good a scholar as he must have known that the sentiment of the verses was of the commonest in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the phrase "lapt" or "wrapt in lead" of no unusual occurrence. The passage a little suggests Mr. Punch's classic parody of the nature of the damning evidence adduced in unfavorable reviews of the poetry of Alexander Smith, —

"'Most *women* have *no character* at all.
Pope.
'*No character* that servant *woman* asked.
Smith.'"

Lowell's failure in complete critical catholicity was less notable than his failure to maintain perfect critical discretion, yet it is still of moment in considering the body of his criticism. His blind spots and prejudices were less rather than more numerous than those of most men, yet in the case of a man like Lowell, who was by temperament so nearly the myriad-minded humanist, some of his dislikes and indifferences are specially surprising.

It was perhaps to be expected of a man with such a core of Puritanism in his character that he should hate all the works of Continental realistic and naturalistic schools with a bitter and communicative hatred, but it was certainly odd that a critic of such flexibility of mind should have proved practically impervious to the germinal ideas which, whatever one may think of their work as art, or as a criticism of life, do give the writings of Balzac et Cie. a pressing claim upon the best attention of any serious modern critic. More important than this prejudice, however, was Lowell's indifference to a vast deal of classic art. As we have seen, at various times in his life he read and re-read Homer and Euripides

with eager delight, and he was uncommonly well grounded in the Latin writers. Yet to the classic spirit he was very imperfectly sensitive. His acquaintance with Greek sculpture and architecture was casual and indifferent. Hellenism, whether ancient or modern, had little meaning for him. He preferred painting to sculpture, and in painting seems to have liked best the "literary" story-telling painters. Of course this merely amounts to saying that his preferences in all the arts were Gothic. A man may prefer the Gothic to the classic and still be a good and stimulating critic. But he will hardly take a place upon the supreme bench of the critical court unless there be imperishably, potently, in his memory the bright forms of classic art as constant touchstones and exemplars.

The truth is that in Lowell's criticism there is sometimes a little of the note of the amateur. He writes habitually more as a reader, a bookman, than as a professional critic. This is one reason why the best of his essays are so freshly delightful. Yet it is also the reason why the body of his criticism is stimulating and suggestive rather than convincing, and why some few of his studies do not so much edify as irritate. Only a critic with something of the temper of the amateur could have spoiled what might have been an excellent study of Carlyle by passages of personal

ridicule, or in the excursus against classicism which forms two thirds of the paper on "Swinburne's Tragedies," have left in his armor so large a chink for the entrance of a classic lance as the heavy and cryptic witticism in which ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ is "cited as conclusive by a gentleman for whom the bottle before him reversed the wonder of the stereoscope, and substituted the Gascon *v* for the *b* in his binocular." [1] Even in so good an essay as his "Rousseau" a suspicion of the amateur temper can be discerned. That is a very subtle study of the sentimentalist temperament, yet it would have been better criticism if, in place of some of the expatiation on the sentimentality of the sentimentalists, we had been given a little more dry light on some of the actual ideas that issued from it, a little of the treatment that Leslie Stephen, for example, would have given such a subject. As it is, one is not made perfectly sure that Lowell had read all of Rousseau, as in reality he had.

Here again, as in some other passages in these pages, Lowell's faults may have been too amply treated. In part this has come about because of the hesitancy which a good many writers about Lowell have shown in uttering their whole mind,

[1] In one of his note-books there had been ripening for twenty years a note about the substitution of "Gascon *v* for the *b*" in "*bibere est vivere.*"

but in a still greater degree it has sprung from a deep-rooted conviction that nowhere in American literature is there so remarkable an instance of how the very greatest gifts of talent, nay, genius itself, may fail of their full fruition through the slightest inattention to the hard counsels of perfection.

Of Lowell's extraordinary critical virtues there is less need to speak at length. If his criticism is not always temperate and judicious, with the utmost exactitude of scholarship; if it has not always the last delicacy of perception and refinement of style, it is, none the less, richer in humor, metaphor, gusto, — in short, in genius, — than any other critical writing that America has produced; and it is not far surpassed in these qualities by anything in the language.

In his "Thoreau," Lowell says that he will try to give the impression of Thoreau's works upon him "both as a critic and as a mere reader." It is precisely as a *mere reader* that he is at his very best. His criticism is always most convincing when most genial. No man was ever more successful in the resurrection of personality, in getting at the active principle of his author's mind, in unearthing the seeds of his thought. He penetrated to these things not with the disciplined acumen of the talented critic, but with the sympathetic insight of genius, and it was

with a kindred endowment of genius that he could express these discoveries, not in paragraphs, but in epigrams. It may well be that no critical organon could be deduced from his work, that few authors are permanently "placed" by it, but no criticism in English is richer in "good things," or more lively with the voice-quality of dead writers. Take his "Walton," his "Dryden," his "Dante," — the two former are unsurpassed, perhaps unsurpassable, and the last, the most direct and solid of his essays, without a joke until the one hundred and tenth page, is still unapproached for the felicity of its dealings with Dante as the poet of "the magical word too few." Or take him on Wordsworth, whose exaltations and tediousnesses stimulated both Lowell's deep imaginative sympathy and his quizzicalness to coördinate activity, and we find an essay that is in the way to become classic. Or where shall we find a more telling union of ideal and verbal criticism than in that delightfully long-drawn-out paper on "The Library of Old Authors?" How variously characteristic is such a passage as this: —

"To hang on the perilous edge of immortality by the nails, liable at any moment to drop into the fathomless ooze of oblivion, is at best a questionable beatitude. And yet sometimes the merest barnacles that have attached themselves

to the stately keels of Dante or Shakespeare or Milton have an interest of their own by letting us know in what remote waters those hardy navigators went a pearl-fishing. Has not Mr. Dyce traced Shakespeare's 'Dusty Death' to Anthony Copley, and Milton's 'Back Resounded Death!' to Abraham Fraunce? Nay, is it not Bernard de Ventadour's lark that sings forever in the diviner air of Dante's Paradise?

> 'Quan vey laudeta mover
> De joi sas alas contra 'l rai,
> Que s' oblida e s laissa cazer
> Per la doussor qu 'al cor li 'n vai.'
>
> 'Qual lodoletta che in aere si spazia,
> Prima cantando, e poi tace contenta
> Dell' ultima dolcezza che la sazia.' "

In humor, in recondite learning, in exquisite sensitiveness, this is Lowell at his best; and in this sort none is better.

Moreover, from the reading of no other body of critical essays in English can the reader learn so much sound literary history. His five essays, on Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Dryden, and Pope, are virtually an adequate account of the development of English poetry from Chaucer to Burns. And, finally, in no other critic will æsthetic perceptions and moral convictions be found presented with less real confusion of

æsthetic and moral ideals, or with a more invigorating earnestness and charm.

There is not a college in America in whose literary courses Lowell's is not a name to conjure with. It is in his freshness, his vigor, his unconventionality, that he is of most service to the academic person who can very well cultivate the more formal virtues by himself. Perhaps in the long run the chief effect of his criticism will be not so much to edify and entertain the lay reader as to vivify the academic reader, and to establish a rapport between the two. Who knows, indeed, but that in the wise economy of nature the establishing of rapports is the eternal business of men of Lowell's stamp, seemingly so wasteful of their powers? We have seen how he was praised in England for bringing the literary set into touch with the official, and it was precisely in this making of the lion to lie down with the reluctant lamb that Lowell unconsciously was always busy. Who else has performed so many and such happy marriages of wit and wisdom, of culture and conscience, of politics and poetry, of literature and life?

Lowell's personality seems to have entranced the best critics of his time, and it is still impossible to write of him without falling in some measure under his spell. Yet, man of letters as

he was all his life, he never wrote a book, not even in the sense that such an essayist as Montaigne did, and it is, perhaps, still an open question whether his many-sided talent, spread as it is through his letters, his poetry, his essays on literature, on politics, on manners, will prove in the event to have the potency of enduring life. Yet the case for him is hopeful. If he seldom wrote quite such fine prose and poetry as other men of a similar grade of ability, he has a salt of humor which is as good a literary preservative as anything in the world except perfection.

At one point at the last the voice of qualification must be stilled. For American readers Lowell's work will always stand for something very special and apart. He was the first true American Man of Letters. We are proud of him now for what he was, for his mellow nature, his richly stored mind, his fertile many-sided intellect, his righteous soul. In the long future we shall, may we hope, be grateful to him for what he has helped us to become.

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